Adventure

June 15th

Published twice a month

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Arthur Sullivant Hoffman
EDITOR

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Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

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Readin', Writin' and Rifle-Guns

Loads

By FISWOODE TARLETON

THE COW is eating the bark on the hickory-tree and the lean hog roots under the stunted beech-woods by the Pelten cabin, on the steep slope of Misery Mountain. The drum-bellied half-breed Walker hound moves nearer the stoop, moves without rising, drags his body lazily with his fore-legs. He stretches out now with his chin on the stoop, looks inside the cabin and whines again—staccato whines begging for his evening pork-fat.

The doorway fills with Isaiah Pelten. He gazes skyward first, then looks down the timbered slope where the dusk is settling, where the sediment of night is thickening. The trail passing the cabin and dipping down to the dry creek bed in the valley that lies between Misery and Porky Ridge is drawing the shadows unto itself; the sediment of night is lying in the trail and sagging into the laurel scrub. But in the little clearing around the cabin a blue-grayish light lingers. This light is the reason for "Pappy" Pelten's calling his girl, the reason he suddenly makes scooping, awkward motions with his arm. Enough light yet for his "gal" to trim his beard with the big shears. He tells her to hustle so they won't have to light the smoky fat-pine.

Rustles answer him. Rustles of the old rose "taffeter" his gal's just stepped into and is fastening around her waist. The taffeter Ruth Pelten gets out to wear to Leeston on Saturday evenings. And to meetings on Sundays. Hauled out now for school. First day of learning on Misery.

"First, first, first," the stiff silk seems to say as Ruth strokes it, brushes it. Flicks off stray threads and dust. "First, first, first." Just what she's thinking. It's as if her taffeter were echoing her mind. Everything's first today, or this evening. First chance to get learning after the raising of Misery's first school yesterday. She'll see Ames Shakespeere, Teacher Ames now, for the first time in ten years. Ames Shakespeere, of Porky Ridge, of the warring Dodie clan, now back from the

academy—the academy where the Baptists make over mountain folks. Where young men and women lose ignorance, become smart. Where they are cleaned of blood hatred.

"Gal!"

Her pappy peers through the doorway at her, making her cheeks flush.

"A-comin'," she answers and picks up the great shears on the cot-bed.

Half-way to the door she stops and listens. She hears faintly the stumbling of a horse or mule coming from the creek-bed road that winds around the base of Misery. When she steps to the door she pauses, holding the shears. Listens again. The sharp clicks don't come any more; the mule or horse has left the gravel and stepped into the trail, is beginning to climb the steep slope. Must be Ames coming now. Teacher Ames.

"Hit air a-gettin' blacky, gal," her pappy says and throws his head back.

His scraggy gray beard's got to be trimmed. Then his ears have to be washed and his jean-pants brushed. Ruth's got to shine up her pappy for school. Teacher Ames coming; learning, on the way.

Only the points of the shears seem to be sharp enough to cut the edges of the silky brown beard. Round and round the weatherbeaten face she goes A little here and a lot there. Too much sometimes in one spot, too little in another. There are steps in her pappy's beard that she can't take out. Steps the shears cut.

He's suspicious, her pappy; feels his beard with a stiff hand. Senses that she's cropping him too close in some places. His cheeks show in spots, like the skin of a mangy hound. But he can't see and she's got to hurry. No time for frills. Pulling him into the cabin she washes his ears, softens the dirt on the lobes with a rag and lye-soap and just wipes them; no conscience, either, in her quick brushing of his jean-pants with the home-made broom.

"Fust letter air A," says her pappy.

"An' nex' un's B. Then, C."

"Huh. Arter C what?"

Ruth scratches her head.

"Lessen hit's D, I dunno. Reckon we-uns'll have a beginnin' anyhow. Hit's likely we-uns'll be a-makin' our names this evenin'. Heered in Leeston long time ago 'at some folks kin writ their names fust day o' schoolin'. Some kin read words in a month. Read tha Leeston *Argus*, Pappy, *in a month o' larnin'*. An' kin word-read what lowlanders ax 'em tuh sign.

"Hain't a-goin' tuh be no thievin' o' hill folks rights effen they larn tuh word-read. Lowlanders hain't a-goin' tuh git fire-coal an' oil fer singin' a song. We-uns kin word-write letters to brother Ned in the Navy, an' kin read what he says 'bout the sea; won' have tuh bother Preacher Luke Jett any more. Huh. Preacher Luke reckons we'uns'll be a-makin' out Bible stories in sharp-quick time, afore we know hit almost. Scripture readin', Pappy. An' we'uns'll have clar-knowins o' what Preacher Luke means. Once yuh git a beginnin'-start, Pappy, larnin' comes in jig-time."

Isaiah Pelten, her pappy, feels his beard again. Must be able to feel the gashes she made in it, must have an idea of how it looks.

"Pappy, yuh reckon Ames air a good un?" She turns her face away from him and adjusts the blue ribbon in her hair. "Meanin', a good teacher, Pappy?"

"Reckon," he answers.

New sounds come from down-trail. The dull pounding of unshod hoofs and the cracking of brush. Must be Ames now, she thinks, and goes to the door. Hardly any light left. Just a little in the clearing, just a softer darkness on the stub. It's getting black under the trees and the trail is visible for only a few feet through the brush. She feels her pappy by her side and a glance at his eyes tells her he's thinking about the past again. He's studying her intently now, as if he's trying to fathom her mind, as if he's wondering just how she's going to meet Teacher Ames Shakespeere, a Dodie clansman, cleaned by the Baptists.

Her pappy no more than she can help thinking that Ames is of the blood of the Dodies, the Daniels, the Taneys of Porky Ridge, who are responsible for her kin's being on destitute Misery Mountain. She was six when it happened, couldn't know much, but if she lives over that day in her mind, ten years back when she was six, what pain must it bring, what fears to her pappy who was grown and felt everything.

Yes, the way he's looking now, he's living that day over again in his mind, that day that he, a Pelten, and all his kin that were not killed outright, were driven from Porky Ridge, where good corn can be grown and white-oak cuts heavy and big, to Misery Mountain, the haven of weak clans. Steep, rocky Misery. No wonder the mountain's called that. And its people remind her of the folks way back in the Lord's time who were driven out of the land—the folks Preacher Luke told them about last meeting Sunday.

Why was it allowed, the driving away of her folks? She's going to ask Teacher Ames that very question first chance. If he's cleaned by the Baptists he'll be able to see through things with a clean mind. Be able to explain how his own blood-kin were allowed to shut up four of her cousins in their cabin ten years ago, kill them and drive her pappy away from Porky Ridge—drive her maw away with herself, Ruth, in arms. Drive all her folks, the Peltens, Wycliffs and Sorrals from Porky Ridge to Misery Mountain.

The hound shifts his position and looks up at Ruth with dull eyes. No-good dog! Gun-shy. Afraid of his shadow. Afraid when he first opened his eyes way back ten years ago. She and her pappy let the hound live and come with them out of pity, just as Misery Mountain tolerates her clan. Howling and yelling, his tail between his legs, he followed her folks the night they all were driven away.

Ruth tries to shut out the pictures, but they persist. She tries to center her mind on the bark-eating cow so that one incident won't creep back into her mind again. But she can't shut it out. And this incident seems always to make the fault hers.

That morning when she was six years old and found the dog collar in the trail was the seed of all the trouble. Not the seed exactly, either, not the beginning, but she fanned old fires when she brought that collar home and put it on her pappy's dog. She should have gone all over the ridge hunting the owner of that collar, ought to have suspected that the Dodie clan would start war over any trifling reason. Never any doubt in her mind about the dog collar being dropped in the trail on purpose. Just so the enemy clan would have a new reason for driving away her folks. Just so they could say that her folks stole-took the collar. And when the Dodies charged her folks with stealing the collar she hid under the cot-bed.

She was only six then, too young. Too young. Too young. Her mind grasps at this thought. But the voice of conscience says she should have hunted up the owners.

She seems to feel still the sting of the brush on her face and hear the rifle-fire

of the Dodie clan driving away her folks. And Misery Mountain seems to be leaning heavily upon her, its whole weight bearing down upon her.

Now the cracking of the brush comes from down trail, and slow, dull pounding of hoofs. And in a minute a lantern glows like an eye. Ames is coming, coming to teach Misery Mountain folks how to word-read and write, and he's got to pass her cabin, got to pass her. His white mule that now looms up in the trail must follow it past her.

She is shaking a little. Shall she stay while Ames rides by? Or shall she escape to the dark cabin, ignoring him? Shall she look straight at him, make her eyes say that she has not forgotten that his people drove away hers? Way back when they both were little he struck her with a stone, didn't he? And hasn't she borne the weight of her clan, the weight of Misery? She'd like to throw the load on him.

In the rays of the lantern, in the reddish glow that now begins to splash the scrub around her cabin, Ruth sees her pappy dimly. He's standing in the doorway, feeling his beard over and over. She wishes he'd stay inside when Ames passes because she wants to look this old enemy of her people straight in the eye, wants to throw the whole load of her people on him.

But her pappy stays to watch, and Teacher Ames stops his mule in front of the cabin, swinging his lantern, throwing the light first upon her then upon himself. His lips part a little, showing his white teeth and his freckles and two red spots on his cheeks. His eyes grow larger, seem to smile, too, for an instant. Then what she's saying with her eyes reaches him. Her thoughts are shadows that darken his face, close his lips.

She did it. She gave Ames the load of her people to carry. He lowers his lantern now and continues on up-trail, prodding the white mule and stooping some, as if the mountain were weighting him down. And there's an easing up of all things within Ruth. First time for years she's felt light.

When Teacher Ames is out of sight, when only the faint rays of his lantern can be seen, Ruth feels her pappy near. Silently they move on after Teacher Ames, the half-breed Walker hound following. Her pappy doesn't speak at all but she feels that his eyes are fixed on her, knows that he's wondering. He must see that she's stepping lighter.

The wind of the trail around Misery to the new schoolhouse is long. Narrow. Rough. But Teacher Ames' lantern is ahead of them. His light means learning, she thinks. They're going to get learning, she and her pappy. All the folks of Misery Mountain, her blood kin are going to be able pretty soon to read and write and count. Will she be able to count the trees on Misery? Be able to word-read about the tribes way back that were driven from the land which Preacher Luke Jett talks about?

After a while when the lantern ahead pauses and swings low and voices come, Ruth and her pappy pause. She wants to stand still for just a minute and look at the folks gathered around the door of the new school. Everything seems like a mystery. Peering through the trees now at the group of her kinfolks shaking hands with Teacher Ames makes Ruth think of a dream. All Misery meeting at night to get learning. And Misery people all look different to her.

Not until they all enter the door after Teacher Ames does Ruth move on, dragging her pappy, who seems to be timid about the night and the new school he helped to raise. Even when they reach the door she and her pappy pause to peer in before entering. Peek in on their kin. Their kin standing around big-eyed and restless while Teacher Ames hangs and lights another lantern and makes the schoolroom bright. There's Annie Trainor, a mother at fifteen, holding her young one, and Annie's pappy and maw and even her grandpappy, all sticking close together. And all the Sorral and Wycliff children with their pappies and maws, the

bigger boys with their tight jean-pants pulled up to show their socks, the girls with dresses that touch the floor. And Grandmaw Pelten in her big-sleeved shirtwaist.

Everybody looks surprized over his own work. Ruth's pappy stares inside at the seats that he helped make and at the teacher's flat table that only a few days ago was rough white oak. The seats and the desks seem different to folks, seem to Ruth as if they were live things, about to speak. Everything looks wise.

Ruth and her pappy enter timidly, nod as if it were strange folks they're meeting and who are staring at them. And Ames is showing all the pupils their seats.

Sliding into hers, Ruth feels as if she were entering a book. She takes a glance at Teacher Ames' face and sees he avoids her glance. She's the only one he doesn't smile on. Must be because she gave him the load, because he's afraid she'd give him another load..

Now Teacher Ames Shakespeere is placing a pencil and a sheet of paper before each pupil, old and young. Men, women and children eye them; their fingers creep along the desk-tops; thin and gaunt hill fingers touch pencils timidly, turn them over gently, pick at the rubber erasers on the ends. All drop them suddenly as Teacher Ames speaks.

Teacher Ames is praying now, giving thanks for the school and asking blessings for the academy that fitted him to teach. Praising the hearts of men of Misery for helping, for putting the building together. Teacher Ames is praising the Lord for cleaning him of blood-hatred, for giving him the chance to redeem the hardness of heart and the cruelties of his Porky Ridge clansmen.

Ruth is trying to analyze Teacher Ames' words. The school came because he prayed for it. He went to the academy to get learning to give her folks. Trying to pay for what his own kin did to hers. He's here to give them learning. Then she seems to lose the thoughts he's uttering, just seems to catch the music of his voice. She's conscious of soft speech, warm speech, a blending of words that are sweeter, softer than even Preacher Luke's.

Even the desks and seats and the blackboard seem to bow before Teacher Ames' word-speaking. All these things seem to blend with Teacher Ames' form and those of her people. All seem like different colors in a square. Like a quilt "kiver", Teacher Ames is stitching. It's as if his words were threads stitching folks together, stitching in himself, weaving himself into the kiver of her folks, the blackboard, map on the wall, the desks—and, weaving himself into her. What's he saying now? Something about loads?

"Give me Samson's strength to bear loads. Lighten my loads with wisdom."

Again Ruth's mind chases a thought. His language once more runs on ahead of her. Her mind is like a hound left behind by the pack; her mind is a hound circling a word, one word. Loads. The load must be the one she fastened on him. The load she threw from her eyes to him. *The load he took.*

Now the voice dies and folks are straightening up in their seats, yet to Ruth the voice seems to sing on, while he steps over to the blackboard, chalk in hand. She wants to pray a while longer. Pray for the load to be returned to her.

Ruth sees the letter A on the blackboard, sees the chalk in hand of Teacher Ames held at the end of the letter. Sees it break and make a jagged, white smear on the board. As if Ames' whole strength deliberately crushed it. She follows his eyes that have flared brighter than the lanterns on the wall. His eyes that flashed like a catamount's.

He's looking at the lone window at the far end of the room. The glass is smashed. The jagged pieces left in the frame rattle lightly. Others are turning in their seats to look. Grave faces glance from the shattered window to Teacher Ames. Some shift in their seats. Some finger their pencils nervously. The older ones show understanding in their eyes. The face of Teacher Ames is dark, his brows catch the shadows.

If she could only get Teacher Ames' eye, Ruth thinks. He's got a new load now. If she only hadn't given him the whole weight of Misery Mountain. She'd melt that whole load away to nothing if he'd look at her. She'd—

A laugh startles the room. Short dry laugh. Strange, weird staccato. No merriment. Doesn't seem possible that it came from Teacher Ames. But it did. Ruth saw it come. That old laugh of the Dodie clan. Hard, brittle warning of the Porky Ridge feudists that the man under their feet is in for a trampling. Warning that the enemy in their arms is going to have his fingers broken. Warning that the man who is the target of their deadly rifle-gun fire will have his nose shot off. That laugh Ruth just heard brings to them all the countless tragedies that followed the Dodie sign of war, of hate.

Ruth heard that laugh the night she escaped with her pappy, maw and cousins. She's heard it since, heard it night after night in her mind's ear. Heard it every night when it became dark in the cabin and her pappy bolted and barred the door. It was only because the Dodie clan thought she and her kin would starve on Misery that they were let alone. But it had always been fear that they'd come that kept her folks on the alert.

Ames is shaking himself now and smiling. He's confused. Blushes and tries to throw soft looks around. Men, women and children are a little calmer as he picks up the broken piece of chalk and points at the letter on the blackboard.

"Now," he says.

"A," mutter some of the pupils.

Maybe it's pride, maybe it's because Teacher Ames seems to expect them to speak out louder, that makes Old Man Trainor roar the letter. Others shout, "A!"

Ruth says it loudly when the voices of the others have died down but Teacher Ames doesn't even look at her. He must be afraid of her eyes. Afraid she'll load him down with another burden or make the weight of Misery heavier.

Now Ames passes down the row of desks and shows them one at a time how to hold their pencils. He's trying to straighten stiff, awkward fingers. He can't seem to find any fault with the way Ruth is holding hers. But she's holding it wrong. As wrong as can be. She's doubling up her fist. He unties the knot in the fist of Annie Trainor who sits right back of Ruth, talks softly to this fifteen year old mother about keeping her thumb and forefinger straight, but passes Ruth by. Doesn't Teacher Ames see that her holding of the pencil is clumsy—wrong?

Everybody's trying to make A with their pencils now. Bud Sorral's slow.

"What letter is it, Bud?" asks Teacher Ames.

"Hit's A."

"It, not hit. Mustn't say hit and hain't."

"Hit," says Bud again.

"Say 'it.' "

"Cain't say 'hit.' "

"Try to say 'can't,' Bud."

"Cain't."

"Well, later you can. All things come, later. Takes time."

Teacher Ames is at the blackboard again, making a B. He glances once more at the broken window and his eyes travel to the lamp beyond the blackboard. Folks look around. Ruth turns and sees a white moth circling the lantern. Must have come through the hole in the window. Through the window glass that seems like a jagged wound in the night. The white moth must be foolish to scorch himself that way, she thinks. And why does the half-breed Walker hound at her feet whine? Why are folks fidgeting? Why does the white moth darting at the lantern chimney give her a cold feeling, make little ants crawl up and down her back? Why does Teacher Ames frown and why does his brow take the shadows again? Why does he seem to be listening?

Ruth speaks to the Walker and kicks him gently with her toe. Why does he keep whining? She wishes that white moth would settle down because it is

getting too much attention and Ames looks as if he's taking on a new burden.

Forms in the schoolroom suddenly stiffen. Gasps come. Teacher Ames himself stiffens. Deep alarm in his eyes. Stiffens as if trying to stand up under a new load.

A sniffing. Nothing more. The long blasts of a breath. Curdling to everybody's blood. Curdling to Ames' blood the way his back jumps and his eyes fly to the door. Mournful wails come from the half-breed Walker. A pencil rolls from the desk. Everybody jumps. Like a door was breaking in, letting in the man-chewing dog of the Dodie clan. This half bloodhound and half the Lord knows what. This trained man-chewer that belongs to Teacher Ames' own brother, Ned Shakespeere.

Nights when the wind is right, traveling from Porky Ridge to Misery Mountain, folks hear it, that bay. In hot muggy weather when that bay comes her pappy always closes the door and they sit in the smoke of the fat-pine, rather than lie down on the cot-beds exposed to this man-chewer. This dog that was trained by Teacher Ames' own blood-brother to enter the open doors and maul and kill, trained by this Ned Shakespeere, who was hunted most of the time by deputy sheriffs, yet was always hidden away by his clansmen, the Dodies.

While everybody seems gripped by silence and the moth darts at the lantern chimney and the dust particles fly before the blasts coming under the door, a tale told by an old Bible-seller comes to Ruth's mind. Comes quick. Flashes before her like an action passing. Tale about Ned Shakespeere making his woman and kids sit in the laurel scrub by the hour while he trained his dog to bound into his own cabin and jump a man made up of straw and rags. The "dark man of Porky" is what Leeston folks call Ned. Sheriffs, too.

This steady sniffing under the door and the light tap of the white moth against the lantern chimney seem to be a weird form of communication; it needs something to break it. Ames breaks it partly. Smiles and passes from seat to seat again, showing folks how to write B.

Ruth wonders how Teacher Ames can smile under such burdens. Two big burdens now. Misery Mountain and his own Porky Ridge, his own dark brother who is—*who is somewhere outside.*

And Ames is showing little Elijah Pelten over and over again how to hold his pencil right and he's trying to smile. And he's looking at Ruth for the first time. Telling her with his eyes to do something. She has a chance to help with the burden. *She can bolt the door.* But his eyes are telling her to be careful. She mustn't start a panic. Got to be careful. Got to think. Got to lift Teacher Ames' burden, not add to it. He means to lock the door at the first chance. Not now. He can't mean now. She nods. She tries to make her eyes express understanding.

She watches the white moth flying at the lamp chimney. Clumsy, ignorant bug. Doesn't he know yet that it's hot? Can't he feel? Can't he—

One of the lamps goes out—the lantern the moth is beating against. Glass falls to the floor. Things are dull and hazy to Ruth. Seem hazy to other folks, too, and to Teacher Ames. A rifle shot is heard right after the lantern goes out, but didn't she see the moth strike the lantern chimney at the same second. A shot from outside shattered the lamp, she's sure of that—but the moth! He's flying at the other lantern now. And the other lantern will go out because the moth's there. Others are watching the moth and shrinking. Bracing themselves.

Ames laughs again. Dodie laugh. Sharper than a knife edge. Cuts into her soul. Couldn't the academy take that laugh out of him? Couldn't the Baptists clean out that last bit of savagery? The sign that somebody's going to be tortured? Ned Shakespeere's spine must be freezing out there in the timber. Can't he read his own language? Doesn't he know what is coming when his own blood throws that warning; cuts the night with it?

The white moth beats against the chimney of the other lantern; the stanchion floor quivers from folks shifting and jerking around, all watching the *moth, as if the moth were trying to shatter* the last lantern. Every time the moth strikes the chimney Ruth gives a jump; her kinsfolk, too. The breath still blows dust under the door; her half-breed Walker whines without stopping.

They're all in a trap. All Misery Mountain folk like rats in a trap. Manchewer at the door and Ned Shakespeere back in the timber guarding the one window.

Ruth sees Teacher Ames throw glances from the window to the last lantern. She wants to call to him not to laugh again unless he really laughs, with open mouth—not make that noise through tightened lips. What's he moving over to the lantern for now? To kill the moth? No. He's stopping four feet from it now. He's looking at the shattered window. What's he standing there for? Just to be the target for his brother's rifle gun?

"Ames," she calls, "Ames, don't!"

Nobody can guess that he's going to make the leap of four feet to the lamp. They see the spring of his body, the upthrow of his arm, the flash of his black sleeve like a swift-moving shadow. Then the room is in pitch darkness. The crack of a rifle-gun and the thud of a bullet on the wall are both sharp, but not as sharp as the laugh of Teacher Ames. He beat the rifle bullet, and somewhere in the blackness of the room he's throwing out a wild answer to his brother. A warning. A laugh!

A thought pushes Ruth out of her seat. She feels her way to the wall and follows it to the door. She seems to be moving through black waters, to help Teacher Ames. The sniffing under the door grows louder as her fingers feel over it, hunting for the bolt, and claws are scratching to get in and the door shakes from the weight of the hound. The manchewer has her scent. Where's the bolt? Why can't she find it? There it is! She was feeling too low. It's home now—home with a click. The hound of the Dodies is baying; Ruth can almost feel its hot body.

"Hit air shet, Ames," she calls. "Cain't *git in now.*"

"Yes, the door's locked—locked tight, folks," Ames says. "Dog's locked out. Nobody can get in. And school's going on."

Again Ruth feels her way through black waters. She feels a soft touch on her shoulder. A hand is guiding her gently.

"Thanks," a voice whispers.

Musical, warm voice. The whispering and fidgeting of her kin folks, the sniffing under the door, the whining of her half-breed Walker hound all seem far away. She seems to float into her seat.

"Thanks," the voice says again. Her blood seems to climb to her head to meet something; a soft pat of a hand coaxes her blood to climb. And the taps seem to say. "Thanks, thanks."

This is because she bolted the door and lifted a little bit of the load. Not much but a little. She'll lift more. She'll make Teacher Ames feel light, and *she* won't feel any loads.

"Tha winder, Ames." Her pappy says it.

"Winder," others repeat.

"Thar afeared tha hound'll git in tha winder, Ames."

Ruth whispers it. Seems like everything is soft and far away. Even her own voice.

"Won't come in the window," Teacher Ames answers. "Doesn't understand windows. Never saw a window. Trained to come through doors. Pap Pelten, you said winder. See if you can say window. Say win."

"Win," says Ruth's pappy, but it seems far away to her.

"Good," says Teacher Ames. "Now say dow."

Ruth's pappy says it plain and loud, as if he's sure.

"Dow."

"Fine," answers Teacher Ames. "Now say window."

"Win-dow."

"That's right, folks. Now everybody. Win-dow."

Everybody says it in chorus. They're not fidgeting so much in their seats. Even the half-breed Walker hound whines less and settles against her legs. The darkness is soft; it is a cover and Ames is speaking under it.

Teacher Ames makes them all say "help" instead of "holp." He's drilling them in G now. To put on G's and take off their A's. Not "a-comin' " but "coming." Because that's the way words will look to them in writing and in reading. The way the Scriptures have it and other good books. Books that everybody will be able to read before they know it, almost.

"Ruth."

Did Ames call her? Yes he's calling again, under the soft black cover of night.

"Ruth, a while back you said 'afeared.' Wrong as it can be. Say 'afraid.' Say A first."

"A," she says.

"Now, 'fraid.' "

She can say it. She can say it. And she can say the whole word, "afraid." Because pats on her head seem to pull it out. She's getting learning. All her folks are getting learning. Lights or no lights. Wonder what Ned Shakespeere is thinking out there in the laurel. Must be gall to his black soul when he hears school going on just the same. Bitter cup for him to drink from. Poison for his black blood to sop up.

All the letters she knows so far—A, B, C, D, seem to be flying around before her trying to make words. She tries to lay them out, tries to make a lot of words of four letters. Ruth wishes she could write Ames Shakespeere's name. Wishes she could carve it with her pappy's big knife on the beech trees and her own cabin. And make her own name under his. Letters whirl and spin before her mind's eye, the four letters she knows, while Ames tells everybody not to say "kiver" but "cover."

The voice of Teacher Ames suddenly seems farther away than ever and the chorus of her kin folks seems faint, a drone. She thinks there's another crash. Did flying letters come together and make it? And why are there lights—starry specks before her eyes that revolve and spin and dance. It was black, and now she sees lights. And who is crushing her head, making it ache. Why is everything strange? Topsy-turvy? Where are her people? Where is Teacher Ames. Are the lights she sees stars? Is she falling from star to star? She needs some one to save her. Needs Ames. The lights go. Blackness, soft blackness comes and a droning. She finds her voice.

"Ames."

"Thar, gal, don' fret. Ames air coming back."

Ames isn't around. It was her pappy speaking. And what's he saying now? That Teacher Ames went out the window when she was struck? When she was struck by a stone?

Her pappy is piecing things together for her now. Hit with a stone thrown through the window by Ned Shakespeere. Hurled into the schoolhouse, the missle found her, through the blackness. She took another load. Just a little one. But what did Ames go for? Where is he? Ruth turns around and looks out the raised window. Lighter outside now. The moon has risen and is filtering through the poplars and beechwoods, touching them with silver. And the laurel scrub is strangely white. Her kin are twisting in their seats, silhouettes against the window. But Ames is out yonder— Unarmed

Ruth's pappy is holding to her waist tight and she is pulling, pulling, trying to reach the window. Trying to break away. She's got to get away. Got to go to Ames! Got to! Her waist rips. Comes off. She's free. Reaches the window and is through it. Running now through the beechwoods and calling, "Ames! Ames!" The bramble is tearing and the laurel scrub tripping her. Her bare breast and arms flashing white before the moon.

She calls again. She changes directions as she runs, as she calls, stopping now and then to peer around. And it's uphill. Her breath is going and her legs grow heavy. She stumbles and falls, tripped by undergrowth. Rising she sees two forms writhing, locked together and swaying in a little patch of clearing. Two laughs seem to crack the night; cold laughs without merriment. Teacher Ames and his brother, locked together, are speaking, threatening in a language of one sound. As if they knew no words. Laughs that sound alike. Hands are gouging, mouths biting, bringing laughs.

Now they are rolling down the slope; they are stopped by the trunk of a magnolia tree and, Ruth following, stumbles over a rifle-gun. Mauser gun that makes only a crack when fired; rifle-gun that Ned Shakespeere put out the school lights with, must be. She picks it up and holds it timidly, awkwardly. Ruth Pelten, girl of peace, stranger almost to the bear, deer and wildcat, stranger to the rifle-gun, like her pappy. Peaceful, shivering Pelten girl stops fifteen feet from the twisting, gouging forms, steps into the shadows of a low-hanging cucumber tree.

She's waiting in the shadows until the dark brother of Porky Ridge has the best of it, until Teacher Ames is worsted. Waiting to help, without knowing how. Swinging the rifle-gun in nervous arcs. Swaying on her legs, she sees Teacher Ames dig his knee into his brother's belly who lets go—and laughs. They are both rising and staggering. Ned Shakespeere, the dark feudist of Porky Ridge, and Teacher Ames, cleaned by the Baptists, facing each other like bears. Staggering and watching for a new hold. Brothers swaying, getting their breaths and laughing. Jerky laughs though; feeble for want of wind.

It's Teacher Ames who notices Ruth first, shivering, pale, in the shadows of the cucumber tree. And what she reads in his eyes, what she hears in his fresh, stronger laugh, as he approaches with hands extended seem to arouse her senses. He wants the rifle-gun. It's only a few steps from the magnolia tree to the cucumber, but thoughts come swiftly to her.

Teacher Ames wants the rifle-gun to save Misery so that learning can go on. He's there to redeem, isn't he? Came to Misery because he felt a call, didn't he? Came because when he was cleaned by the Baptists he felt a load, felt the burden of Misery Mountain's wrongs. Came to give learning; to lift, to ease a load. And when he passed her cabin on the trail she made it heavier. And now—and now—he wants to take on the biggest load of all, for Misery Mountain—for her.

"Ames! Ames! Don't, Ames!"

Words, pleas won't stop him. His laughs are louder, sharper, colder. And Ned Shakespeere is coming now, armed with a big stone. Teacher Ames grabs for the rifle-gun. She must make his loads lighter. He mustn't take on another. Mustn't. She is backing away from Teacher Ames, escaping around the trunk of the cucumber-tree. She is ducking under his arms. And Ames is laughing and answering his dark brother who is close. When Ned Shakespeere's arm is thrown back to throw the stone that looms so big against the moon, somehow the muzzle of the rifle-gun is pointed at him, very close to him. Somehow she finds the trigger and pulls.

She sees him spin, releasing the stone slowly. Sees him fall. Hears him choke a laugh. Then things grow dim. Not black but silvery. Silvery haze. Silvery veil. She's being carried through the veil. The silvery veil is cool.

She must be heavy to carry. Through the thick laurel that looks white, over fallen birches that are silver, through the veil that is covering everything.

"Hain't I heavy?"

A voice answers. Soft voice.

"Nothing is heavy. But you mustn't say 'hain't'."

By
GORDON MacCREAGH

Reward

IT WAS Luis who saw him first. Luis, you know, has eyes as dark and alert and fast as a Cebú monkey, and notices just about as much. We were coming down the Rua Lisboa in Porto Velho, the other one of its two streets, where the less respectable of the stores are; and as we passed the drinking shop of Perez, Luis caught me by the arm and motioned with just his eyes to the window.

"Look, that's Jorge Davis," he said, out of the side of his mouth. "I wonder what deviltry brings him up so far out of his territory?"

I had never seen the man before, though I had heard enough about him; and, like Luis, I couldn't imagine what would bring an operator of his caliber all the way to this dead place. He was a man who played the towns of the lower Amazon; anything from big swindles to holdups, and if a killing should be necessary, why, Jorge had no conscience to hold his hand. And here he was.

There was no money in Porto Velho; never had been since rubber went smash. Big river-boats still came all the way up the Rio Madeira once a week to take balata and a little hardwood, but there was no profit in that. They came only because the company had a cast-iron subsidy from the government that they had shoved through when all the world thought that the rubber from the upper jungles would make all of them rich.

The same with the railway: Two hundred kilometers through the solid jungle to get round the sixteen cataracts of the Madeira-Mamore, because the water was so bad that rafts would be smashed into toothpicks and canoes stood one chance in a hundred of getting through. Millions of dollars it had cost them, and the talk was almost a slogan, "A life for every tie." And now a train ran every two weeks.

There was nothing in Porto Velho to interest a man like Jorge Davis. There was nothing to interest anybody at any time; the place was dead.

So I said to Luis—

"Let's go in and look this bad man over."

And Luis—well, for all that he is a smallish man and a Brazilian, nothing scares him; he's so fast he can look after himself in any company. He shrugged and laughed.

"*Pois bem*," he said. "Let us go. But you, you great *guariba*, don't you go and get into any fuss. We've got our balata business that we came here to look into."

Amazon's White Waters and a Timber Cruiser

The *guariba*, you know, is the great red howler monkey of the foothill country, noisy great brutes that you can hear roaring a full mile away as the sun comes up. And the big males will fight almost anything in the jungles, except perhaps the larger cats. Our paddle-men—you know how those river Indians are; not awfully complimentary about nicknames—they call me the Guariba on account of my size and red hair; as they call Luis the Macaco, because he's small and dark and as clever as all sin.

Well, we went back up the street and into Perez' place and called for a gourd and *bombilla*. I stick to the *maté* myself 'cause I've seen too many white men go under with *aguadiente*. There's no white man can stand hooch when the temperature stands at an even hundred and the humidity somewhere near sixty.

Jorge was bragging about something or other that he was going to put over on somebody, and the gang of hangers-on that always collects around that sort of fellow was applauding his loud mouth. He looked us over with a hostile frown as if we were butting into some place that he owned. And of course he pretty nearly did right then. He was one of those big, hard looking fellows who are natural gang leaders—truculent and determined enough to swing the crowd his way; and there wasn't any doubt at all that he could have had the place cleaned out in a minute if he'd wanted. You run up against that kind every now and then in any country that's far away enough from a policeman. He'd had his own way for so long that he was just asking for trouble and ready to meet it on the jump.

Those fellows always get me steamed up. But Luis was kicking me under the rickety table so that our drinks spilled over, and he was telling me:

"That one is a *malo hombre*, my friend; nine parts of mixed Indian and negro and renegade Spanish and one part of far back American or English or something, wherever he gets his name from. And he carries pistols hidden as is your custom in America."

Well, I'm a peaceable man myself. I'm never aching all over for a fight; there's always trouble enough in that back country anyway. So I sat still, and the fellow figured we were harmless enough and went ahead with his bragging. The crowd of mestizos and breeds around him laughed at his every second word, so I couldn't get much of what it was about. But I caught this—

"—that gringo may think himself *muy caballero* because he has some money, but I tell you, my friends, when I shall be finished with him—"

That was all I got, and at that Luis kicked so quickly at me that he knocked a silly leg from under the table and down went the whole mess, *maté*, gourds and all. The stuff was still boiling hot, and Luis got most of it over his pants leg. Luis is a neat dresser, even in jungletown on the edge of nowhere. White duck pants and

all that sort of stuff, and he surely absorbed that hot drink plenty. He jumped up with a yell, trying to hold them off of himself; and I got so weak with laughing at him that Perez was able to curse us and throw us both out of his shop.

Luis, of course, had to go right back to our room in Mother Gomez's and get into clean pants. As for me, I was glad that I wore cord breeches and jungle boots, and a spot or two didn't matter. I was going out just as I was when Luis grabbed me. He's uncanny sometimes, is Luis. '

"I suppose you're going to the hotel now, *amigo mio*," he guessed. "You want to find out about this gringo that that great gorilla spoke of. Now listen to me. Compatriot of yours he may be or no; but don't you go shoving your nose into anything that is none of our business."

I had to laugh at his cleverness. Of course I wasn't aiming to horn into anybody else's trouble. I'm none too keen anyway on this rushing up to a stranger and calling him brother just because he happens to come from some spot in our three million miles of United States. I've seen too many of our people come out and make plain fools of themselves just because they can't seem to understand that they're foreigners now in somebody else's country. But there was half an afternoon to be killed yet in this dead town, and I'd been figuring that if this gringo had just come up on the last boat I might as well go over and visit and swap yarns and maybe get an old newspaper or a magazine.

"Very well, then," said Luis. "I shall come with you and see that you do not become entangled, my friend."

So we went over, and they told us, sure there was a gringo, arrived by the last boat—three of them in fact; two and a gringita. And at that I would have backed away, because, shucks, while I was dressed as good as need be for any man in a jungletown, I was in no way dolled up to meet a lady. But Luis was right at home there. He dragged me with him into the wide veranda—all copper-screened because the yellow fever mosquitoes at Velho are something awful—and before I knew it he was presenting me. Luis can stagger along enough with English, though he's a scream; he just turns the high-flown Portuguese idiom over. It's fine among themselves, but it just doesn't fit into plain homely American. He swept his hat over the floor and bowed and spouted out:

"Most excellent senhor, I present the illustrious, the American of the North, Senhor Jeem Dillon. Explorer most renowned of the jungle productions and—my friend the much esteemed."

That's their way, you know. Introducing first to the gentleman, the boss of the party, and leaving the lady out of it for the senhor to present or to chase away, as he may think best. There was no mistaking who was the boss. He was a pursey old party with an air of assurance and reserve that comes with having money enough to buy most people's services. I could seee in a minute that he wasn't longing to throw himself on my neck just because I happened to be another American and we were in the far-away end of nowhere.

I suppose rich men get to be that way, upstage and suspicious, because there must be an awful lot of people trying to graft on them for something all the time. But he stood for us courteously enough, though he oozed all over him that he wanted us to make no mistake. We didn't belong in the same crowd and this wasn't going to be the beginning of any lifelong friendships.

He introduced us to the girl, his daughter, and to the youngster who was with them.

"My engineer, Mr. Hammond."

Just like that. He had bought the engineer's services and there was no mistake about that either. But there was no high-hat about the girl. She was home folks American all the way through, the best kind, and a prize winner. Tallish and slender, sun-tanned, with brown hair and eyes—or maybe they were blue—but, thunder, I can't describe them. It takes Luis to do that.

She came right out and she wanted to know all about us. We were jungle prospectors, were we? And we got out jungle produce? What kind of produce? What was balata and what was the meaning of bleeding chicle latex? Were we ever attacked by Indians, and what about the big snakes? That's the one they all want to know, and they're always disappointed when you tell them you've never seen a thirty-foot anaconda, let alone the hooch-dream sixty-footers. They don't want to believe you; they look at you in a hurt sort of way when you tell them that; as if you were lying to them.

She wanted to know just about everything there was, and she dragged the engineer youngster into it, too. He was as eager to find out things as she was; his interests ran right along with hers. But, much as he wanted to get into the talk, he hesitated to horn in; he was diffident in the presence of his boss. It was pretty clear that he didn't measure up to the social scale, either.

I let Luis have the girl and I got the young fellow to open up a bit with me; though he kept listening with one ear and half the other to those two; and it was easy to see which conversation he wanted to take part in.

A good looking lad he was, too. I don't mean handsome. I mean a good, husky looking youth, with plenty of bone right were it belonged—in the shoulders and the jaw and along the eyebrows. He sized up like the makings of a good jungle-man and his questions showed that he knew something about the beginnings of it. His side specialty was forestry, it turned out. Mr. Wallfurth—that was the boss—was interested in hardwood lumbers and had come up to investigate the possibilities here. And that was all I could get out of him. With pa sitting there, smoking fifty-cent cigars and saying never a word, the youngster of course froze right up about his affairs.

Well, it's a finnicky kind of business at any time to shove in and give advice that nobody has asked for; and with Pa Wallfurth it was impossible. I did manage, without giving offence, to bring the talk round to Jorge Davis. Said I'd seen him in town and understood that he was interested in a deal with our friends—and you should have seen pa's eyebrows go up at that last word! And I tried to slip a hint that Jorge's reputation along the river country would bear watching. But pa blew smoke out of his nose and flicked ash from his cigar as slowly and watched it as carefully as if that was the most interesting thing he'd seen for a long time, and then he said:

"Thank you, Mister—er—Dillon, is it? I have been in lumber deals before; and while I am no technician, I have taken pains to assure myself that Mr. Hammond's expert knowledge is ample to form an accurate estimate of value."

There he was warning me off before I'd ask him for a job or something. So I quit trying to poke my nose where it wasn't wanted. I've never been one to go around advising people about their business; and if all that this bird needed was expert advice about lumber values, I'd be the first to admit that this forestry youngster would know more about woods and what they were worth than I ever knew was in the book.

We jawed around a bit after that, but it was never what you'd call a sociable evening amongst friends. The old man wasn't exactly hostile, and he made no yowl about his girl and his hired engineer treating us as if we were classmates from the same home town, but he oozed all over that we didn't belong to his lodge; and there was no getting over that. We got up and reached for our hats before he froze us in that warm tropic evening, and no sooner were we clear of the hotel compound than Luis rhapsodized forth into the night.

"Name of the holiest, but what an offspring it is that that old manatee has! What a graciousness! What a smile of the white teeth! Did you note the limbs, *amigo Jeem?* Sacred hat of a Pope, *qué completamente simpatico!*"

Luis, you know, cusses like a good parrot, and with all those fellows, when they

rate a woman as *simpatico*, that's the extreme limit. You can't buy them any better.

"But what a shame," he gabbled on. "——, what a crime that this stuffy old horse of a father is presently about to be swindled by Jorge Davis! *Amigo*, it is up to us, who know the country, to see that—"

But I fired his own medicine back at him.

"Don't you go shoving your nose into anything that is none of your business," I told him. "We've got our own balata business to look after."

And I asked him how did he know that Jorge Davis would get the better of Mr. High-Hat? He'd made money; and it's a pretty safe rule, I've always figured, that if a man has made money he's made it by being smart enough to get the better of other people. This clammy old cuss knew his markets, I guessed, and he was wise enough to hire a man who knew woods.

"You wasted your time chattering with the girl," I told Luis. "But take it from me, brother Jorge Davis isn't going to put anything over on that engineer lad. That boy's got it all above the eyes. And, look you, friend, he's crazier about the girl than you are; so he'll be loyal to Pa. Jorge isn't going to be able to buy him."

To which Luis grunted and he groaned a while to let it soak in about the girl, and then he said:

"Well for you to talk like a professor of logic, but all I can say is that you don't know Jorge Davis! *Diablo*, the man has a method! He never fails."

IT WASN'T later than the next evening that we had an opportunity to see something of the deadliness of the man's method. We were loafing down the Rua Lisboa—there wasn't a blamed other place to go—and as we came opposite Perez's place we both stopped suddenly.

We were on the other side of the street and we could watch from the shadow. You see, there are no street lamps in Velho and the only lights are the dingy oil-lamps of the shops every here and there. Perez' place had no doors or windows, of course—just square holes in the 'dobe wall; and being the *botequim*, the local saloon, it was the best lighted show in town. So we could see in easily enough.

And why we stopped was because we saw what didn't belong in that hole. And that was Hammond the engineer youngster.

Perez was right up to date and had an American bar. All along one side was a shelf behind which he kept his bottles, and those who thought it was too provincial to sit at one of the greasy tables stood in front of this and called their drinks. And there was Jorge, laughing loudly and clapping the youngster on the back and calling him, *mi compatriota*. His big bull-voice came out to us across the street.

"I too, my very good friend, I am an American, though of the South. Davis, my illustrious father—"

And at that some one laughed. It was too much even for that gang of toadies to hear this almost black seven-eighths breed claim the father he had never known. Some one he couldn't see; but the laugh choked in his throat. At another time Jorge would have ripped him wide open for that, but just now he was playing another game. He didn't want to frighten his newest friend away—or let me say, rather, he didn't want to put him on his guard, for I don't think that lad would be easily frightened.

So instead of whipping out the knife that stuck out from his high boot, Jorge but half-hunched his shoulders and scowled at the offender and demanded in a voice out his belly like a jaguar—and he was clever enough to slide over the real issue.

"Is it that I understand you to laugh at my illustrious father, you offal?"

And, "No, no! By no means Senhor Davis—I but—" the man stuttered and his voice choked again in a dry rattle of deadly fear.

"Ss-ssso." Jorge hissed like an anaconda and you could see him grow smaller as the wind went out of him. "Ss-ssso it is therefore that you still live. But your presence, none the less, gives me to vomit."

It was enough. In another second the man slunk into the wide shaft of light that came through the doorway, and then he was gone in the shadows. Jorge's shrug was as good as a whole ten minutes of brag, and then he turned to carry on his game with the engineer lad again.

Oh, he had power all right. Out of the dozen or so of men there, not one of them dared to talk or laugh or to breathe until they saw how Jorge wanted it; and they were pretty hard cases who went into Perez' place.

We leaned against our wall across the road and watched, and presently another figure appeared in the sudden light of the doorway; going in this time. I recognized this one, a fellow called Lobo, a dock-front loafer about whom the talk was that he could be bought to stick a knife into a man for as little as fifty milreis. He seemed to greet nobody; but in another second we saw him through the window hole take up a position near this Hammond lad and call for a drink.

In about a minute another man went in, a big Jamaica nigger fellow left over from the days of the railroad construction, and if anybody could have a worse reputation than Lobo, this boy had it. He edged in alongside of the other killer and made as if he'd just stepped in for a drink. Luis smiled up at me from the corner of his eye and said very softly—

"I told you, *amigo*, that you did not know this Jorge Davis."

Of course I could see the game now. It was one of the oldest in the book, but it had every chance of working against a new hand who didn't know the river country. There would be an argument about something, the lights would go out and there'd be a scramble; and when it was all over there would be young Hammond with a knife in his belly. And who would mourn loudest but his new friend and *compatriota*, Jorge Davis?

"But why? What's he got against the youngster?" I asked Luis.

And Luis laughed hard and short and said to me:

"Sometimes, friend Jeem, your head is as thick as your arm. He has nothing against the youngster but his knowledge. It is the lad who is the expert on the values of timber. Therefore that knowledge which is the old man's protection must be removed. Oh yes, Jorge has a method with him, I tell you."

And then Luis hummed a little tune and beat the time with his foot; and then he cussed a red streak and complained, as if it were my fault.

"I tell you, *amigo*, people who are hampered by any scruples of the conscience are always at a sore disadvantage. Here we are put to no end of a trouble and danger just because you won't let me kill this Jorge dog out of the safety of our darkness here."

I had said nothing at all, of course. But Luis knew, I suppose, that I would have kicked about taking a pot-shot at the fellow out of the dark. Not that I'm any purple and gold saint, but it's a funny thing, the prejudices a man grows up with. If you're out to kill a man, what difference does it make whether you sock him from a safe distance or whether you walk up and give him the call when you know all the time that you can pull a gun faster than he can. But if a man has grown up with our American notion of fair play it just sticks, that's all.

So Luis cussed me for a hide-bound fool and stepped down the road to a little old *chucheria* store and called to see some knives. Cheap things with a heavy blade and thin handle in a papier-maché case; and he picked one that balanced comfortably to the hand. To me he said:

"One does not throw one's own good knife—which moreover remains as an identification. And since it is your fault, my friend, that we must sink to such a subterfuge, yours be the position of danger. You go and stop Jorge as he comes out and leave it to me to get the young gringo away."

I guessed what he was aiming to do and I knew just about what would happen. So I crossed over and waited in the shadow just outside of Perez' door. Slanting through the opening, I could see Jorge

and the youngster and the two knifers, and I hoped almost that Luis would miss his throw and stick one of them.

But Luis' hand was too sure. In just about another second the knife zipped in through the window and smacked into the wall between two bottles; and after it had passed it seemed as if Jorge's hat twisted round on his head. The talk all stopped dead, just as if the knife had cut it off. And then Jorge roared out a *Santa Maria* and snatched the knife from his boot and came charging out like a bull.

That was what I was there for. As he came out of the door I stepped out from the shadow as if I were just passing, and Jorge barged right into me. He was a heavy great beast and he was coming —— bent, but I was ready for the shock, of course. My shoulder took him just under the chest bone so that he bounced and gagged from the jolt of it.

I hollered out, "Whoa there! What the ——!" and I grabbed him and tripped him up and fell on him hard; and then I rolled under as the crowd streamed out, and let his friends trample all over him. But you can bet I kept hold of his hand with the knife.

He yelled blue murder and howled at me to let go and swore he'd rip me up; and I hollered just as loud for him to get off of me. And between us we put up such a racket that presently the crowd came back, figuring surely that Jorge had caught some one in the shadows there; and they all stood around and yelled advice to him about how to stick me.

So then I turned him over and hoisted him to his feet. He was heavy rather than husky and I could handle him all right. I pushed him back through the door into the booze joint and I put on a high tone and demanded.

"Now senhor, perhaps you will explain why you rushed out without provocation and attacked me in the street?"

I pushed him off and stood far enough away so that I could smash him if he tried to jump me with his knife. He was just a bit leery about the way I'd handled him, but he was so mad that he forgot all about telling me the reason for his wild charge into the night. Instead, he ramped and brandished his knife around and yelled what he would do to me. And the gang, all primed now to see somebody carved, egged him on.

"Go ahead—show the gringo."

And so on.

Luis told me afterward that I was a fool. If he'd been in my place he'd have jeered the fellow on to make some play and then would have plugged him in self-defense and would have done a service to the community as well as saved all kinds of trouble later on. But I let the chance go. I guessed that the diversion had given Luis plenty of time to get hold of the youngster and since I didn't see him anywhere in the crowd I figured my job done. So I made a grandstand play. Something of a take-down was coming to that big big lollop anyway.

I said—

"Listen, you who talk so much about knifing gringos, I will show you a trick about knives that we gringos learn at school."

And I made a quick lunge and caught his knife arm at the wrist, as they used to teach us in the police school back home when I was learning to be a cop, and I gave it the old twist and drag so that the knife spun away and he gave a yell and grabbed his arm as if the elbow were dislocated. And I told him:

"That other gringo, the young engineer, is newer from home than I. He will be able to show you many new tricks about knives."

And I left the crowd gaping and went out; and the minute I was out of the door, I ducked into the shadow and round the corner of the building, and I went on home round by the back lots. I wasn't passing in front of any shafts of light from windows.

Luis had the boy safe in our room when I got back—and considerably pop-eyed he was looking, too. He couldn't understand it and he didn't want to believe it. Why, the man was so cordial and he was hoping to put a business deal through

with the boss and all that. How could it be reasonable that he would want to put a crimp in the deal by starting trouble now? So I said to him:

"Listen, buddy, back home you'd be careful what kind of a dive you went into with a tough looking stranger, wouldn't you?"

And he said, of course, anybody but a fool would watch where he went in the back alleys of New York. And I asked him then what made him think he was any safer here in a back alley of Porto Velho than he would be in New York. And that left him looking foolish. Of course there was no answer; but a lot of fellows are like that. They come out all green and stick their faces into places they'd walk blocks to avoid at home.

Anyway, we convinced him that he'd had as close a shave as was necessary and that Jorge Davis was a man to watch. And then of course he was all full of thanks, and nothing would do but that we should go right over with him and explain to the boss what kind of a man he was dealing with. Luis was ready enough and thought it would be a nice little visit. But I just laughed at him and told him, "*Não presta ti la donça*," which I figured the youngster wouldn't understand, being Brasileiro slang for "Swell chance you've got with the girl." And I told the boy to run along and explain his own troubles to his boss. I wasn't shoving my face in to get told that I'd be asked for my advice when Mister High-Hat thought he needed it.

SO WE saw nothing more of our good folks from back home till a couple of days later we jumped the fortnightly train for up beyond the cataracts. And there they were too. They were going to Villa Martinho about two-thirds up the line. It's only about fifty or a hundred kilometers but it takes two days to make it, because that train doesn't run at night —I suppose on account of the jungle having grown over the track since it was last there. I got talking with the youngster and I said to him—

"So it's cedar that your chief is interested in?"

And his eyes popped, as if I'd tumbled into a trade secret, and he wanted to know how the heck I knew about it. Though there was no trick to that at all. What else would a man be interested in at Martinho unless it were cedar? So I asked how they intended to get the stuff out. And he said that that was what he was there for; to look the stuff over and make a report and all that before the old man would close any deal. And right then the old man called him. Afraid he'd let some vast business out, I suppose.

It gives me an awful ache, the way business men get to be close-mouthed and suspicious; just as much as to say to every one's face that he's a probable crook and will steal the deal if he can find out anything about it before it's all closed and tied up and everybody's name is on paper. Jorge Davis wasn't on the train, so I couldn't feel that it was up to us to wet-nurse my fellow countrymen along; and I nudged Luis and we drew off, leaving them to their merry party of grouchy one with two well controlled assistants—which pleased the young fellow and the girl well enough, I suppose.

But at Martinho the old man creaked open a bit. Martinho is a place about half as big as Velho and twice as dead. Just a score or so of 'dobe houses that had blossomed out to hope for rubber and had died right then. One of the houses had three rooms, and that was the customs, because right across the river was Villa Bella on the Bolivian side. Another one had four rooms, with mud floors and mosquito netting nailed to the window holes. That was the hotel, where you could get a meal served on a three-inch thick mahogany table with another half-inch of grease on the top and eat it with wonderful old Spanish silver which the proprietor wouldn't sell because it was a proof of the kind of folks he came from.

Pop and the girl were going to stay there while the youngster cruised this cedar prospect; and the old man loosened up enough to say that our experience of

jungle work would be of use to his engineer here and he'd like to hire our services. So I said I'd hire out to be anybody's servant and so would Luis—at our own price; and our price was ten dollars a day each. He swelled himself all out, of course, and ate up a cigar and said he didn't see any need of paying a price like that just because I was an American. And I told him, all right then, there were some fifty men in Martinho, every one of whom knew that back jungle country, and he could hire any twenty of them to be his servants for ten dollars a day; and we had business of our own to attend to across on the Bolivian side anyway. And with that I left him.

But after chewing over it a while he sent the youngster after us to smooth us down and to say go ahead. So all we had to do was get our camp stuff across from Villa Bella and we were ready to go in the same day. And at that I don't think we stuck the old grouch so much. He would have paid nearly what we charged him in sheer wasted time getting equipment together if he'd hired the local talent. And as it turned out, it was just our speed that saved his hide in the end.

We took the youngster in and showed him what there was, and he surely was a treat to take around. Of course he'd had forestry experience, and that helped him a whole lot. But even so it was a wonder how he got the hang of jungle work. In just a couple of days we could let him go so he wouldn't lose himself, and he got into the swing of a machete in the underbrush so he could cover distance as well as most men. We looked over the ground pretty thoroughly, and he was all enthused about the timber.

We'd walk him dead all day and then every evening he'd sit and write a report of distances and quality and measurements and so on which he'd send in to the old man by Indian runner. It was wonderful stuff, of course, as everybody knew—virgin growth, never cut over, and averaging about forty inches diameter. Miles of it, and all splendid timber without a flaw. The boy would look at some of those trees almost as if saying a prayer and then he'd pretty nearly cry when he began to understand that there was no way of getting it out. That was what was going to spoil the deal, of course, and it was easy to see why Jorge Davis had been anxious to get the engineer out of the way.

But Jorge had a method, as Luis always said; and he never failed. And he'd have held to his record this time, too, only he hadn't reckoned on our getting through with this job as fast as we did. Speed is always difficult for those fellows to understand. We covered that district pretty well in about a week, till the expert knew just about what there was and what it was worth and how small were the possibilities of working it. And then we came out to tell the old man it was no go. Exactly what I could have told him right away from the start if he hadn't been so darned secretive and upstage with us.

And then we learned about clever Jorge. The old man was lounging in the mud veranda with his feet on the rail, looking as pleased with himself as all those fellows do when they've put another big deal over.

"Well," he said, "I've bought. Pretty stiff price, but if that timber is as good as your report said I know where I can get seven cents a foot for it."

"Bought?" yelped the engineer. "How the— What—?"

"Yep." The boss put all the snap and pep of big business decision into it. "Yep, Mr. Davis came up in a hand-car and he was willing to make a price since he needed some money for another deal, and—"

"And he's gone back by yesterday's down tram, I suppose," I cut in on him.

The big boss nodded. Nothing had hit him yet. I pushed the engineer lad aside. His job depended on this sleek goop and he'd be saying things that the old man wouldn't forget.

"D'you mean to tell me," I said, "that you paid money to Jorge Davis for that piece of jungle?"

The chief began to get stuffy. He could see that there was something not

altogether right, and he began to defend his business head.

"Oh I've examined his title all right. I took the precaution to have that looked into before we came up here. He has clear title from the government."

"How much?" was all I said to him.

He was becoming a whole lot stuffier about the way I stood in front and looked at him; and there was Luis smiling like a cat behind me and murmuring at the same time.

"*Deu graça*, alas for the so beautiful girl who loses just that much of her inheritance."

And the engineer lad just sweating blood, though he stood to lose nothing out of it. He was just loyal to the man whose money he was taking.

"Your questions are verging on the impertinent, Mr. Dillon," the boss swelled up at me. "It's none of your —— business, but I don't mind telling you I gave a check for ninety-five thousand dollars, and if my engineer's reports—"

He was going to tell me how much money he figured on making out of some thirty miles of standing cedar at seven cents a foot. But, thunder, I wasn't dependent on his temper for a job. I stopped him. I said—

"I don't know how well you can afford to lose ninety-five thousand dollars, Mr. Big Business Man, but I do know how you're going to lose it, and it'll do you good to sit still while I tell you.

"Listen now," I told him. "Of course Jorge Davis' title was good. That title has reverted to the government half a dozen times 'cause the holders couldn't prove up on it. Jorge probably paid ten dollars per hundred *hectares* for it. And why? D'you think you're the first big operator who found out the timber was there? And I guess you won't be the last to find out you can't get it out."

He began to growl something about the railroad. But I stopped him again. Gosh, as if Luis and I hadn't gone into every angle of that thing six years ago!

I shoved him back in his chair and, "Listen some more," I said. "When this railroad started it had about eight boxcars and two flats, figuring on rubber. Now its got maybe one flat that can be fixed up to carry lumber. If you're good at sums, do a few in your head and figure out what it will cost you to have enough cars built in the United States and shipped out here to carry enough lumber to pay for them. And when you've got over your headache from that, figure out how much it'll cost you to import enough Jamaica niggers to work your lumber and to insure them according to their government demands. The railroad brought over all in all some forty thousand—and thirty thousand of them are buried all along the track.

"Your hired engineer would have told you all this in his finished report if you hadn't been so darned cocksure of your business cuteness. And I'd have told you all of the same and more if you hadn't been so businesslike and suspicious of a stranger from back home. You and Napoleon, you play lone hands, don't you? Well go ahead and figure a play on how you're going to get your check back."

Well, he was looking pretty purple by then. I guess back home where his money hired servants for him, nobody had talked to him properly for a long while; and I think, too, the money was more than just a drop to him. But he managed to work up a sickish sort of grin and he asked—

"What's the matter with rafting it down?"

And it did me good to see he was not so slick sure this time. Kind of hesitant, because he'd taken in enough from my little speech to allow that all the other people weren't altogether fools, and he knew there must be a hole in that idea somewhere. And I told him the hole.

"Listen," I said. "There's about two hundred miles of river between here and Velho, and about seventy-five of that is cataracts. Not just rapids, but half a mile of river going somewhere else lower down in a hurry. All of that two hundred miles of river bank is boardwalked with cedar that folks have tried to raft down. Up here it's whole logs; about middle it's

splits; down that end it's a sort of mush of match sticks and kindling."

Of course, I was stretching a bit there. But it was true that any loose stuff that came down was so ripped up that it was worth nothing—you know how that Spanish cedar splits. Well, the old man wasn't so stiff-necked that he wouldn't admit, since other folks knew all about it, that there was more than one good and solid reason why no one had grabbed off that concession before. But what was he going to do about it?

He just sat with the spine wilted out of him and looked at me and then at his engineer. I was waiting to see whether he'd try to blame the boy. But no, he wasn't mean. His whole trouble was just that he was too stiff in the collar. The starch was out of him now though, and he just slumped back and looked to his engineer for help. I guess he figured he'd done nothing to earn our particular loyalty or support.

"Is there no way?" he kept asking the youngster. "No way of stopping it? The next train—"

Well, the boy didn't know. So I told him.

"The next train down will come two weeks from yesterday. Yesterday's train reaches Velho tonight, where the river steamer meets it and leaves tomorrow morning at just about this time. And that's how much time you've got to stop him."

The old man shut his eyes and let his head drop back as if he'd been hit; and I guess that money hit him harder than he'd like to admit. And then the corner of my eye caught a flutter, and there was the girl, standing in the doorway. She was just looking at the youngster, too. Not at us, mind you, not at Luis and me, who knew the country and knew the inside out of things. No, her confidence was all in the boy. All big-eyed and white she was, and her lips trembled red like a grenadilla flower against a white-washed wall.

Luis groaned as if he had a cramp and cussed a long streak of red-hot Brazilian saints and took oath about all the things he would do for a girl like that. And I—well, I suppose she did look like a combine of all God's good things that a man misses out on when his itching foot drives him out into the jungle places, as had been my luck. So I grabbed the boy by the arm and took him outside and, "Listen brother," I told him, "if you've got guts enough I'll see what I can do to help you."

He just hung open, waiting for me; and I told him that it could be done by taking the river. The Indians used to make it in dugouts sometimes before the railroad came. They used to say that one out of a hundred got through all right if they were good men and made the proper sacrifices first. Odds enough to keep the thing from being a popular sport, but you know how Indians will take risks that's make your hair fall out, just to earn half a dollar's worth of cheap trade-goods.

There were a few of them left still and there was one right there in Martinho who bled balata for us—a good man with an eye like an otter's for fast water. So I told the youngster what the chances were, and if we made it at all we'd shoot that two hundred miles of water like taking the chute at Coney Island.

He grabbed me by the hand and pumped up and down and said sure he'd have the guts to risk a canoe ride for the sake of—and then he boggled and reddened up just as if he had something to be ashamed of. But I told him, shucks, shooting fast water that an Indian would do for half a dollar didn't call for guts. What I meant was if he'd have guts enough to hold up the old man and tell him flat he'd gamble his neck to snake him out the hole on just one condition; and that was that ninety-five thousand dollars would even up the social difference between an engineer and a big business man and the boy'd get an even break with the girl.

His eyes popped as if some one had thrown in a ten thousand volt switch behind them and he left me as suddenly as a wild pig. And I, I went off to find our

Indian canoe expert. I knew that the boy, with the pep that he now had, would come back with pop's consent all hog-tied in his pocket.

And of course he did. He shone all over like a meteorite and said it had been simply wonderful and wonderfully simple. Pop didn't have a peep in him and even his cigar hung limp. And he had to shake hands with both of us all over again; and then he had a sudden thought.

What about us? What would we be getting out of it? Why should we be risking our necks, and all that blah. He was a good lad. But Luis cussed him and growled:

"Saints' teeth, is it not that this foolish pig-head is paying us ten dollars a day? We have no notice of discharge. What a delay about words while that train is still running! By this time the canoe will have been torn from its tie-rope."

So we pushed him along with us, still blithering; and our man was already waiting where I had told him to. He had brought his son along too, a stout lad who he swore was as good as himself on the steering paddle. He himself would perch kneeling right up in front, of course, with his toes hooked back into a little loop of rope. You'll hear a lot of rubbish from people who don't know anything about it that it's all to the steersman. But let me tell you, in fast water it's the bow man who does all the work, and any half-way fool with a paddle can follow him.

The three of us piled in between them—it was a good big dug-out built for carrying balata. All we did was to take our heavy boots off and lash them fast as a precaution against the upsets which we knew were a certainty, and then we were off. And, holy rum, did we go!

The first stretch of white water began less than half a mile below the settlement, and we took it in a thin brown streak.

"Awai-ang!" yelled the Indian; and we dug in, because the more speed on the canoe, the better the control in fast work. The trouble with these Madeira cataracts is not only the big black rocks that stick up like jagged teeth, but worse than them, the fellows that don't stick all the way out.

That's a considerable river you'll understand, since ocean steamers can come all the way to Velho, just below the last of them. There's an awful volume of water going down, and where it comes on some of those submerged benches it just climbs up in a hill and swooshes down the other side in roller-coaster waves. That's where the danger comes. Any good canoe man can dodge the teeth, but it takes control, let me tell you, to jerk the canoe nose clear of a hollow into which it's all —— bent for diving.

But we made it all right, and I can tell you I sweated. I'd been in fast water, but I'd never worked in anything like this. When we reached a stretch of easy going at the end of it, the youngster behind me laughed. He asked:

"How long d'you make that run?"

I knew the lengths, pretty near all of them, from reading up the survey reports when I was considering working that same cedar prospect, so I told him—

" 'Bout eleven miles."

He laughed again. He carried one of those wrist-watches in a rubber case such as they sell to greenhorns in the sporting goods stores, but it was still going, and he reported—

"Seventeen minutes, by golly!"

"Well, do not be downcast, *amigo*," Luis told him. "There will be some twice as long where we shall go much faster."

And, of course, we did. The fourth run after that was a killer. "*Diente' d' diablo*," it was called. Devil's teeth. And it was well named. There were places where the rocks stood up like a comb and the water piled up and then sizzled between them under pressure like soda water. There were still relics of five years ago when the last man had tried to run lumber. Logs had stuck end on and ridden high up, and there they hung, split in two and dangling on either side.

But our man was a wizard. He hugged close by the edges till the banks slid by in a blur; or he made out for the middle

and whizzed between frothing black teeth according to the requirements of what came beyond. You'd have sworn he had a government chart of that water. And so we made that one too. I forget in just what time. But the youngster timed it and whooped us on. By golly, we'd make Velho before the train at that rate, he kept yelling.

And then, of course, came the accident that we knew would come. And at a simple little place too. It was just a short run of water, not half as bad as what we'd come through. I don't know just what happened, but it felt as if we rode on to a submerged rock, and in a second the current swung us broadside on, and in the next second we were in the race.

My luck was against me that time. There was no chance of anybody's making the bank right out of the run. Nothing to do but keep afloat and try to avoid getting smashed till we'd reach the next half-way smooth spot. I was getting along fine till some funny current sucked me under for longer than usual, and then I got bumped on the head. It knocked me pretty dizzy and I could only just about remember somebody grabbing me —and then a long haze of water and scuffling, till presently I was hauled out on the sand of a back eddy.

When I could see straight again all the rest of them were there and our Indians were bringing the canoe in. There was no damage except that I was a bit too woozy to swing a paddle for a while. But that boy was a terror. He was pretty well scratched up himself and bleeding some about the face, having been unable to look after himself so well while hauling me out.

"Come on," he yelled as soon as I could sit up. "Come ahead. We've lost fifteen minutes already and we've got a race on our hands."

And so they hefted me in and I was glad enough to lie down in the wet while the rest of them whooped and swooped on down. I couldn't see any more than the branches of overhanging trees whiz by every now and then, but the rest of it was just about the same as the foregoing. Toward the end I was able to sit up and help a bit, and— Well, in the long run we made it without any further trouble. We reached Velho by daylight, and I was excited enough to stagger along with the rest of them to the station yard and I whooped and hopped there with them till I went dizzy again.

We'd done it, by golly! We'd made close to two hundred miles of water travel in about eight hours—and that's some going, let me tell you.

And the train wasn't in yet! We'd beaten it by fifteen minutes. And as it came snorting in, Luis said to me:

"Now you keep your great hands out of this, *amigo*. You sit still and watch. I can handle this Jorge Davis."

And I was glad enough to sit on a crate and look on. I knew Luis could take care of anything that was likely to happen.

I WISH you could have seen Jorge Davis when he stepped from that train and saw us. He was the only passenger—that's how much business that railroad did—and he swung out of the coach with a grin on his face as if he had already cashed that check. And then he saw us and the grin dribbled loose from his jaw and his burnt-coffee skin went clean mottled like a good soap.

Almost before his feet reached the ground the youngster was in front of him and was telling him, hard and steady—

"I've come to get that check, Mr. Davis."

Jorge was no coward, of course, and no fool. He didn't have to gape and ask questions—how, why, what? He wasn't a man to waste time in guessing. The point was that here we were and it was up to him to act. And he wasted no time about acting either. His heavy brows came down like a monkey's and, believe me, when he scowled he was one bad looking *hombre*.

"So," he growled from his belly.

"That check, my gringito, yes?"

And his hand began to sneak down to his boot. But Luis was on to that.

"No lower, Dom Jorge," he said easily.

And there he was smiling like a tea party and balancing his knife comfortably in the palm of his hand, all set for a fast underhand throw. It stopped Jorge just the same as if it had been a gun. He cursed Luis plenty and loud, and as he cursed his eyes, like a snake's, were flickering quick glances around the score or so of people who make up a crowd in Porto Velho.

I could see he was playing for time and whatever luck might turn up. And it began to turn all right. The man had power. The sheer cussedness of his reputation was the sort that will draw tough eggs to a man, hoping for a share of whatever loot might be going and a return of the favor maybe some other time. A few hard looking citizens began to edge in on the three of them. I was in no shape to start a battle with the whole gang. So I yelled to Luis to hold the crowd and I jumped from my crate to take a crack at Jorge. But the youngster was way ahead of me.

"Sit down!" he bellowed at me. "He's mine. I gotta earn what I held pop up for."

And he waded into Jorge. But the young fool didn't smash him on the jaw as he should have done. He seemed to think that since the other wasn't standing with his hands up and the gong had not struck, it wouldn't be fair. Instead, he tried to grab him and search his pockets at the same time. Thunder, I couldn't have done that myself! In a second it was rough-and-tumble.

But what a rough-and-tumble! Luis waved the crowd back with his knife and they made room *pronto* and very respectfully. Jorge Davis had the weight over the boy, but he was none too hard, as I had already learned, while the boy was as clean and hard as a steel tape. Together they went down and rolled like terriers, with the station gravel flying in clouds, Jorge trying to get his knife from his boot and the youngster trying to get the check from his pocket. They kept rolling under the wheels, and all at once I saw Jorge's game. He was aiming to roll under the carriages and then knife his man and get away on the other side of them. I yelled to the boy to warn him. He spat gravel from his mouth to holler back that he was all right. And then Davis got the knife clear and got in a short stab that put it well through the kid's cheek.

My heart came up into my mouth where I could taste it, and I thought it was all over and cursed my dizzy head. But the boy hit his teeth on the blade, and the next thing it was clear of Jorge's hand and there was the boy trying to shake it free of his cheek and Jorge snatching for it as it wagged in the air.

But that was the beginning of Jorge's end. Losing his knife took the guts out of him, as his wind was pretty well gone too. The boy loosed the knife in a little while and managed to get on top and stay there. And then he started methodically, between whiles of fighting back at Jorge, who kicked and bit like a gorilla, to rip the pockets out of his clothes, one after the other, and, with them, whatever cloth came away in the fistful.

He had Jorge three-quarters naked and raw from the sharp gravel before he found the piece of thin blue paper that he was after. Jorge bled as much from the cuts over his body as the youngster did from the hole in his cheek. And at that, Jorge made a last despairing grab at the fortune that he was losing and tore it in half.

It's funny how a man, when he's been trying hard for something, gets to attach a value to the thing itself. As in this case. For a minute the youngster felt that something precious had been ruined, as if it had been a treasury note for the amount. And then it broke in on him that tearing the check up was just what he wanted to do most and he grinned; and the stretching of his cheek emptied half a pint of blood out of his mouth on to Jorge's face.

And the crowd, that had been all tense, suddenly haw-hawed at the queer look of the thing.

So then the youngster got off his man

and stood up and the first thing he wanted to know was how soon we could get a hand-car and start back. But Luis took him on one side and I on the other and we led him away, soothed him. We told him that we'd all had a pretty strenuous day and here was sundown and he needed patching up a bit and, by golly, it wouldn't hurt his boss to remain in ignorance about his check for a day or two longer. As for us, we aimed to rest up until the next train went.

But the boy—well, I'll swear that the one side of his face went as red as the side that was smeared with the blood from his cheek; and he shuffled his feet and mumbled—

"Well, you fellows can stay if you want to of course, but—I've got to go and claim my reward."

And hanged if he didn't get a hand-car and go the very next day.

And two fatheads went with him; and they were Luis and I.

A Maker of Champions

One for the Book

By EDWARD L. McKENNA

BACK in the old days there was a man named Michael McGloyne, and he ran a boxing club over where the Italian quarter joins Darkytown. A trim, tight little club, and many a customer felt better after he'd got inside and every now and then one of them was held up on the way home, but that didn't discourage trade a great deal, for you couldn't go to a club in the country and see better bouts, taking one week with another. The Republic A. C., the name of the place was.

Mike was two things—a showman and a match-maker. A feature of the evening was his comments on the entertainment he had offered his patrons. He'd get up into the ring after the semi-windup and take off his derby, and his bald head would glisten rosily under the lights.

"Gents," he would say, and the chorus of hoots and cat-calls would at last die down, "tonight's fights was rotten. That Smoky Donahue will never fight in this club again. The first prelim was O.K. The second bout was not so good. This here Smoky Donahue—I couldn't help it, gents, I never saw him before—he was well recommended to me by—by good people in Newark. I hope the windup 'll be a little better. Next week—" hoots and groans and shouts of "pipe down!"—'Next week, I got Whitey Fitzpatrick, and Jimmy Clancy—"

A pause. And a howl of joy. And Mac would beam at them.

"On account of the rotten show tonight, I won't put the prices up for next week, like I was going to. And I got—"

Maybe next week would be swell, with tough fights and a couple of real knockouts. Mike would climb up again, with his hat in his hand.

"Gents, tonight's bouts was O.K. That boy that got knocked out in the fifth, I'm gonna put that fight on again."

Loud applause, some of which is ironical.

"And that third bout, the only way I could make it better would be to give them boys meat axes. Them boys is good, willing boys and they can fight for me any time. Now, this next bout—" a yell, a hungry yell, from the citizens—"this next bout, gents, ought to be as good as a murder. This Jim Clancy, from New York, he ain't the champ yet, but the boy that can take him can beat the champ, and I say so. And maybe that's Whitey Fitzpatrick. Next week, gents—"

The only man in the world who could get away with a line like that was Michael McGloyne. The reason he could

was because every one knew that Mike said exactly what he thought, without tact or elegance. The light of sincerity illumined his remarks. He'd wave to the referee, sometimes during a slow bout, as if he were shooing chickens, and the referee would speak to the boys and point to Mike, and the boys would attack each other with considerably more fury. They knew that if Mike was forced to do it again the referee would stop it, and it would be a long, long time before either of them performed again in the Republic A. C.

It was conceded that Mike had a fine eye for the difference between art and artifice. When Mike said a man was yellow, it was no light word with him. Many a fight he stopped himself, particularly between heavy men, but he never shooed with his arms then; he'd catch the referee's eye and shoot both hands up in the air, and maybe he stopped a case or two of manslaughter that way. His referees were good, and he'd back them to the limit. Mike had been a referee himself and he knew what the job is like.

It is generally agreed that there has never been a better match-maker than Michael McGloyne. He had an uncanny gift for bringing together two boxers whose styles suited each other. It's a queer business. Butcher McGurk, 135 pounds, from Jersey City, may be a good scrapper. Johnny Callahan, of Manayunk, also 135 pounds, may be a lusty fellow. It may happen, however, that a bout between these two tough men of nineteen will be a horrible thing to watch, because, because—oh well, what's the use? If you don't know, it's no good to tell you. On the other hand, if Butcher McGurk is thrown into the arena along with Dutch Dunkhorse, 137 pounds, of Fargo, North Dakota, all the referee has to do is get out of the way and stay there, and presently you'll see up in the gallery, if you're fool enough to look back, a lot of iron-workers and factory-hands and teamsters and casual laborers crowding the edge of their chairs and in a few minutes they'll be on their feet, howling, cursing, their arms jerking and their teeth bared, while Dutch and the Butcher are giving them their bit of vicarious romance.

It takes as much imagination to match prizefighters as it does to make a piece of verse, and considerably more people are interested in the result. Imagination, and a love for fights. And the man who has imagination, it is usually conceded, lacks very often the accountant's faculty, which is also a factor in the business of running a club.

Mike McGloyne was a very poor business man. He paid too much money for his bouts, he was always overcredulous of hard-luck stories, broken hands, torn ligaments, pulled tendons, disorders less professional. Ten dollars here, fifty there. "All right me boy, all right. I'll get a substitute." And the substitute frequently was a better man, who cost more money. Mike gave shows where he packed them in, and all he'd have for his trouble might be a hundred dollars, and sometimes a deficit.

So when at last Mike came to make his own battle with the pneumonia and they counted him out beneath the flickering light of the blessed candles, it was found that he had left practically nothing except a lot of young children.

His friends did what they could. They chipped in, they made mysterious or miraculous discoveries of concealed assets, a few dollars here and a few dollars there. Some very dubious people came forward with money they claimed Mike had lent them, people who were furtive looking, who spoke without much movement of the lips. A gang leader in the neighborhood swaggered in with five hundred dollars. Disdaining subterfuge, he denied personal acquaintance with Mike, but said this was from the boys, see, to a square-shooter, see?

And a benefit show was arranged at the old club. Three-round bouts. This one and that one would show for Mike. For Mike. Why sure, every pug in the business knew him and was for him. They'd get a wonderful card.

A wonderful card is what they didn't get. This champion was too busy with his vaudeville engagements. That one was on his honeymoon. Another was in Bayonne, training and under contract. Jim Clancy, who used to think the world of Mike, what do you think he done, the big nut? Joined the Navy, yeah, out with the Asiatics. And there were excuses, refusals, alibis, suspicious inquiries concerning guarantees.

All except one. This one was a boy who had been a boot-black, a little Italian boy. Call him Peter Carbone. Not a flashy fighter, but a serious, infighting one. Not a knocker-out in three rounds, six rounds. Let him get a smart boy in there for ten rounds, fifteen rounds, twenty rounds, and the smart boy might ultimately wind up as Goofy So-and-so. Same pace, all the time, bang, bang, bang, preferably in the stomach. There wasn't a man in the world could keep him away for twenty rounds. Probably that was why he was the champion.

His relation with Mike McGloyne had been personal. Maybe he remembered Mike when Mike was praising him from the ring and he was a stranger and unknown in the East. Maybe Mike had lent him money—there's no list in the world of the people Mike financed—he wasn't the kind to keep one. Maybe Mike gave him a bout when he needed it. It wasn't for publicity's sake that Pete Carbone came from a considerable distance to box at Mike's benefit. And when he showed up, in a hundred-dollar suit of clothes and with his usual impassive, politely bored expression, they offered him a check and he waved his hand at them. Told them to turn it in with the proceeds of the benefit to Mike's family.

Perhaps you know what benefit shows are likely to be like. A lot of clowning, by men who may not be in condition. Plenty of bouts and no action. Boxers don't fight for fun as a rule, and who blames them? The customers may get a little peevish, but they're only hoping against hope anyway.

Well, they trotted out Peter Carbone and the boy he was to fight, a compact, dark kid, looking something like a light negro, or a Calabrian. Alabama, his name was, or something like that. Not Alabama Joe, or Jim, or Jack. Just Alabama.

Clang! went the bell, and up went Alabama's right without feint or parley. Six inches, or eight at the outside, it traveled, and it just grazed Peter Carbone's jaw. And the customers went "Ooh!" This might be different.

In a way, it was different. Alabama was there to fight, and Carbone never was known to balk anybody who had that in mind. Pete was carrying his championship and a champ is a fair target, benefit or no benefit. He fought his usual workmanlike fight. Alabama let that right go fifty times, but it was after all a conspicuously forthright hand and it never caught the champ once. Peter would duck, bob his head down and go *bang-bang-bang* with left and right. It soon became evident that the champ had Alabama tied to the mast. But it was the best thing on the bill and they got a nice hand.

The champ came to the dressing-room with a little cut on the corner of his eye. Nothing to amount to anything. Once, when he ducked, he felt something flick into his left eye. A glove-lace, maybe, or the torn heel of a glove or the flap of the heel, perhaps. He sneered when it was noticed.

In a week, the eye was badly inflamed. He put collodion on it and paid no attention to it. Then it swelled up and shut, and he lanced it with a pen-knife. It still bothered him. Finally he went to a doctor. The doctor cured Pete Carbone but he couldn't cure the eye. The eye was sightless.

Figure to yourself the unexcitable, cynical Mr. Carbone when he discovered this, planning his future. Maybe you're a marksman. How'd you like to start shooting from your left shoulder for the rest of your life? Well, Pete shot from both shoulders, but his left wasn't his

poorer hand, and it was his left eye that couldn't see.

He kept his bad luck as quiet as possible. After picking up a little money in a few bouts, he made a match for the championship and lost. There might be a nice story in those last few bouts.

After that, he dropped out of sight. Don't know what he's doing now. Maybe he saved something, maybe he didn't. Perhaps he's shining shoes again.

There's this to consider. Men of his weight don't make enormous sums; they have to fight often; they have to work hard to make weight and they don't last long as champions. Pete Carbone might have lasted longer; certainly the eye didn't help any.

It would be nice to think that Mike McGloyne is looking down at Pete Carbone, wherever Pete is. Looking down at him, saying prayers for him, waiting to welcome him when the last gong clangs for Pete. Because, if there's any heaven, it seems likely that Mike McGloyne is there. These old beliefs were comforting.

And if not, then what? Here's a little wop, loses his championship in helping a friend for old time's sake. Cuckoo, wasn't he?

You don't think so, do you? Do you think a man like that hasn't got something to remember that's worth all the days when he used to swagger down the aisle, the skirts of his bathrobe fluttering, while the crowd yammered at him? He's got a championship now that they can't take away from him.

A Passage Round the Horn

Deep Waters

By BILL ADAMS

IT HAPPENED nearly thirty years ago, when I was in the prime of my youth. I was proud then. I was third mate of the ship *Twilight*, of the old Frisco grain fleet. It was my first voyage as an officer. Six times already I'd been around the Horn—thrice westerly, with general cargo; thrice eastward, with grain for European ports. Each westward passage had been in the dead of winter. I was well enough used to the Horn hurricanes.

Whether the little red book was coincidence I leave to you, to judge when I've told you about it. Queer things happen at sea.

It was a girl who gave me the book, slipping it into my hand as she bade me good-by before I boarded the train for the port where my ship lay.

"Read it when you're at sea," she said.

It was wrapped up and tied when she gave it to me, and for a long time after I sailed I forgot all about it. There's small chance for any reading 'round sailing day. There was to be small chance for me that passage.

Over three years I'd sailed with the *Twilight*, an apprentice in her half-deck. Of the six of us who had gone to sea together over three years ago I alone was left. My old comrades were gone, some to other ships, some into steam. In the old half-deck that had rung with our laughter on many a tropic night, that had echoed to our weary curses in many a

savage blow, were now six wondering soft-handed, first-voyage apprentices. A sense of solitude, a sort of foreboding, oppressed me when I came aboard my old ship. But the sea is no place for that sort of thing. Small room for sentiment in a sailor's life. Standing alone, self-sufficient, one watches the weather and lets the wind blow where it will.

WE SAILED on a bright May morning too early in the day for many people to be about. Our crew came over the bulwarks at the last moment, as the *Twilight* glided from Tyne dock to the North Sea upon her long voyage to San Francisco. As was usually the way with sailing ship crews—most of them were more or less drunk for the commencement of their voyage. The chief mate scowled as he watched them aboard.

"It's 'round Stiff in winter with a gang like that, eh?" he grumbled to me. "Tally 'em over and see if they're all here."

When I had counted the hands and found four men short the mate turned to a group of loafers who watched us from the pier-head.

"Who wants to make a voyage to Frisco?" he shouted. "Four o' you fellows jump aboard here if you're coming!"

Shoving and elbowing one another, the loafers made a rush for our rail. There was no time for the mate to do any picking or choosing, and the four who leaped to our deck were a sorry looking lot.

"That'll make a fine crew for winter 'round Stiff," muttered the mate contemptuously.

As soon as we were a mile or two offshore the tugboat left us and we went to setting sail for the long passage. It was quickly evident that our crew were but little better when the drink was out of them than when they had climbed half stupid over the railing. There were but a few who were fit to be called able seamen. Of the four who had answered the mate's hail three had never been aboard a ship before. The fourth, a young fellow, said that he had once been cook on a fishing smack.

Our mate scowled to me again.

"You'll need your bully beef," said he, "if we're ever going to fetch the old hooker round the Horn with this gang."

AUGUST off the Horn. Dead winter and an undermanned ship! I'd a cold touch of foreboding at the mate's words. But the sea's no place for forebodings.

The chief mate was a sailor of the old school. A bucko in his early days, he was now a bucko no longer, for bucko mates were no longer allowed. It was become illegal for officers to beat their crews into shape by means of fists or of belaying pins.

Our second mate was a big, hard-swearing, loud-voiced, heavy-handed man some ten years my senior. Half the sailors and half the apprentices would be under his command—the starboard watch. The mate and I would have charge of the others, the port watch.

The second had never been westward 'round the Horn before. A colonies and Calcutta sailor, he was used to the big following winds south of the Cape of Good Hope; used to the running of the easting from there to Melbourne, to booming eastward 'round the Horn on the road home again, with the hard westerlies behind him. He'd never met the Cape Horn hurricanes head on; never spent weeks at a time trying to beat a ship to the westward. But he'd heard plenty about it.

"It'll be the grace o' God," said he, "if this old hooker ever gets to Frisco."

Though no more a praying or worshipful man than was I, he used an expression for once that had no swearing in it; though, in his way, he doubtless meant it for swearing.

"It'll be by the grace o' beef, and —— take the men that hangs back!" growled the mate.

"Maybe, sir," said I, who had heard that such things had happened to some lucky ships, "we'll get a fair wind round the corner."

"And maybe we'll catch extra particular ——, my son," retorted the mate.

WE'D A fine fair passage all down the Atlantic; week after week of the pleasant flying-fish weather. The green boys picked up the names of the ropes and learned as much as youngsters could be expected to learn in the time. They groused at the grub and stole from the cook as any decent young apprentice should. But one passage down the Atlantic can't make a first-voyage lad of very much use to a ship. As for improving the men, smartening them up or teaching the lubbers amongst them anything much, it seemed that it could hardly be done. Ignoring them as far as he could, the mate left the handling of our watch to me; while, forever regretting that he couldn't use his big fists on them, the second mate swore at and berated his boys and men alike.

"What's come o' that grace o' God o' yours, Mister?" grinned the mate one evening when we were all three on the poop together.

"Grace o' ——!" snorted the second, and glowered down at his watch who were sweating up the weather main-braces on the deck below. We were nearing the wild, cold corner.

BY AND BY we arrived off the coast of Patagonia. To the south and east lay the Falkland Islands.

It was close to eight bells, eight o'clock of the first night-watch and, with the second mate and his men below, off duty, the mate and I were together on the poop. Our men and boys were pacing the deck in twos and threes. Under full sail, the ship was slipping through a nearly soundless sea, her canvas barely filled by the light breeze. Above her mastheads shone a full white moon. A high wintry haze obscured all stars. In a little while the second mate would come up to take charge of the ship till midnight and the mate and I would go below.

At the moment that a young apprentice came to the poop to strike the bell the skipper looked from the chart-room door; and at that moment a high tiny wisp of cloud swept across the moon, dimmed the light for an instant and vanished into the eastern sky as if shot from some terrific wind gun. The apprentice struck the bell. From the focsle head came the lookout-man's cry,

"A-l-l-l's well, sir!"

On their way aft to answer to the muster roll, men and apprentices swarmed from their quarters.

A second cloud wisp whipped from the western heaven, sailed like a terrified bird past the moon's cold disc and fled after its predecessor. The night was grown suddenly eerie. The low slap of the bow-wash was become as a sob. A sail flapped. A block groaned.

The skipper's voice rang out:

"Shorten sail! All hands on deck, Mister!"

As the mate and I leaped from the poop to the main-deck below, the second mate rushed from his room and joined his commands to ours. Pandemonium broke loose where but a moment before had seemed complete peace. Blocks skirled as ropes whipped through them. Sails flapped and rustled upon spar and mast. The entire sky was become flecked with flying wisps of white. But as yet there was no wind save in the high heavens; only a gentle air.

While the port-watch sailors mumbled and muttered at being kept from their sleep, the oaths of the second mate, the gruff orders of the mate, rang down the moonlit deck.

In a little while the loftier sails were rolled up. The ship rode almost erect. Confident that they would now go below, the port-watch looked toward the quarter-deck, waiting for the mate's, "That'll do the watch."

"Keep all hands on deck, Mister! Get that mains'l off her!" shouted the skipper.

Again, while they cursed in low voices, while bank on bank of frayed white cloud rolled over the moon, the mates and I drove the watches to the gear. The sea sobbed. Blocks creaked and groaned. From afar there came a sound as of the bellowing of many bulls. The skipper roared from the poop, bidding us hasten.

The mate snapped out sharp orders; while, savagely swearing, urging apprentices and men to bunt- and clew-lines, the second mate led the way from mast to mast.

The moonlight grew suddenly fainter. The sea became obscure. The bellowing herd sounded nearer. A spray flashed over the weather rail as the *Twilight* lurched uneasily to a long steep-sided swell that rolled beneath her keel.

"Look alive! Look alive!" shouted the skipper, his form now shadowy on his shadowy poop. A gust filled the tops'ls. Sprays drove over us in a chill hissing shower. Sails crashed against the rigging. The sea seethed. Steel sheet-chains clattered upon steel masts. Ropes lay in tangled coils about the deck, and water, flowing now knee, now ankle deep, tangled them further. The light grew dimmer. Shout, oath and exhortation mingled with the rising storm.

The wind was become a steady howl. Voices were swept away and lost. A green man crouched terrified in the shelter of the midship deck-house and, dragging him to the shrouds, the mate cuffed him aloft to help roll up a beating sail.

Led by the second mate and me, followed by the mate, foremast men and apprentices swung in the dizzy rigging. Hunched shoulders dragged at wind-bellied, ballooning sails. Water dashed waist-deep along the deck's length. Orders went unheard. The skipper's whistle went unheard. Where any men hung back we encouraged with unsparing fists. The sea raged far below. Upon us, about us, above us screamed the gale.

When, by and by, we descended to the deck an apprentice, swept from his feet by a shoulder-high sea, was washed against the iron bulwarks. A momentary moon showed him clinging to a rope's end, on his knees, water to his armpits, a red gash on his forehead. The second mate leaped and lifted him, swung him across a shoulder, sped with him to the half-deck, flung him within the door and yelled:

"Stay there! Stay there!"

HOURS passed. The wind choked us. Sprays lashed our forms and faces. Our arms felt as if wrenched loose from their sockets. Our knuckles, our nails bled. We were soaked to the skin, to the bone. The cold was bitter. Now knee deep, now waist deep in the hungering seas, men and boys down from aloft again endeavored to clear the tangle of the ropes, braces, buntlines, downhauls, clewlines, knotted and intertwined, all washing to and fro.

His lips close to my lips, his eyes within an inch or two of mine, the mate shouted—

"Here's some o' the second mate's grace o' God for ye!"

All night there was no rest for any one. Dawn came, and with the dawn the wind increased, a thing that during the night we would have believed impossible. Again, extra gaskets in our hands, in our belts, about our shoulders, the second mate and I led men and boys aloft. From the swinging, dripping foot-ropes the sea was hidden from our view. We saw only the bare masts, the two last sails, steel-hard and gray—main lower tops'l and foretopmast stays'l, drum-tight and straining, threatening at any instant to blow from their bolt-ropes. Now and then the top of a deck-house. Now and then a hunched form battling its way along an unseen lifeline.

The mate's face was blanched. His mustache white with salt, his eyes red-rimmed, he hobbled on a twisted ankle.

"If she comes through this—comes—through—lucky!"

His face close thrust to mine, he screamed the words.

A sea had swamped the cook's galley. The Chinese cook made no effort, was incapable of effort to rekindle his flooded fire. Breakfast time, and no coffee. We munched sea-biscuit.

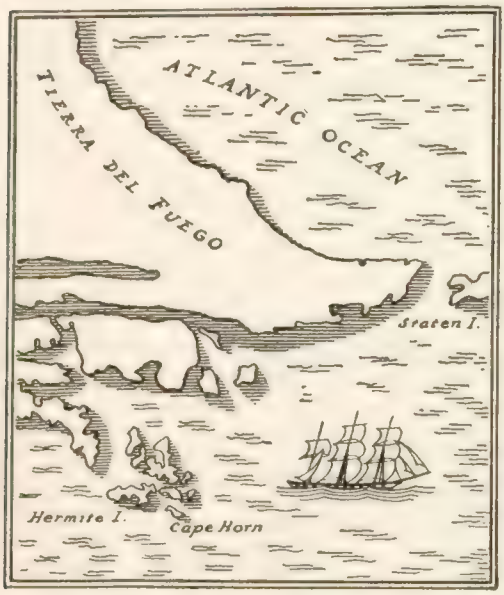
All through the forenoon there was no rest for any one. There was no sky. No sea. Uplifted, disintegrated, the surface of the ocean hurtled through the howling air in a white wind-whirled blanket of smiting, stinging mist. The slope of the

deck was as the slope of a steep roof.

Night was falling when the mate made his way from mast to mast, feeling, trying, testing stays and shrouds. There was nothing to be done. The gale must expend its fury.

The skipper sat in his chart-room. Their backs to the bulkhead, their feet braced, the mate and second mate stood outside the chart-room door. Between them, I dozed on my feet. It was no night for any officer to go below.

HOURS passed. When voices awakened me the wind had eased. I had fallen to the deck and had slept in a sitting posture. One or other of the mates had



passed a rope about me. I heard the skipper's voice:

"Get all hands out, Mister! Get them all below. Not a minute to lose!"

Wind and sea were gone down, but the slope of the deck was still as the slope of a steep roof. Wondering dully at the steep slope, I clambered to my feet.

"Come on," cried the mate, "another hour o' that and she'd have gone. The cargo's shifted."

Understanding came to me.

By the gloom-laden light of midwinter dawn we unbattened and took off the hatches and herded men and boys of both watches below into the hold. With the second mate and me laboring among them, urging them on, they rolled barrels of cement and shifted pig-iron. Slaving for their lives, for the ship's life, they staggered beneath the wrenching weight of railroad steel.

Seated on a cement barrel, the mate growled continually:

"Move along! Move along! If we don't get her straightened out before the wind comes back she's gone. Use your beef now!"

No sound reached us from the deck above.

By and by the Chinaman appeared and looked placidly down upon us.

"Cloffee leddy," he announced. At the mate's grumbled "all right," aching backs straightened. Speechless because too tired for speech, weary beyond all weariness, the toilers ascended from the dusty hold.

In half an hour we drove them below again, to totter, gasp and stumble through a brief but endless-seeming winter afternoon. Their features thickly coated with cement dust and with salt, the eyes of the foremast crowd looked like the eyes of dead men. Slow-falling snowflakes drifted through the open hatch and fell on upturned, haggard, hopeless faces. The apprentices were wan, altogether incredible, voiceless as young ghosts.

Toward evening the mate left us, to return and look down on us in a few minutes. He beckoned to the second and whispered to him. The second in turn beckoned and whispered to me.

My heart was light; my tiredness of no further consequence; the peril of the ship and of her people forgotten. The skipper had decided to put into the Falklands in the hope of finding men to take the places of our poorest foremast hands.

Noticing our changed demeanor, the men looked at the second mate and at me wonderingly. The second cursed them and urged them to their toil. But

when I whispered the good news to an apprentice he passed it on in whispers to his fellows. The half-deck lads shook off some of their weariness and labored with a better will.

By dusk the ship was on an even keel again. We closed and battened the hatches. All hands made haste to their suppers of skilly and sea-biscuit, the apprentices gleeful at thought of fresh meat and green vegetables to be enjoyed when we should come in to Port Stanley.

After supper we set sail while the moon rose. A gentle breeze was blowing us toward the Falklands. The sky was clear. Great snowy albatross flew round the salt-incrusted ship. Cape pigeons, gannys, mollyhawks encircled her.

His brows puckered in deep thought, the skipper impatiently paced his rolling poop.

Eight bells struck as the last sail was sheeted home and, leaving the second mate in charge, the mate and I went to our rooms—to take off our sea-boots for the first time in sixty hours, to climb into our bunks and fall instantly asleep.

WHEN we returned to the poop at midnight the ship was racing through a cream-crested and dark-hollowed sea. The second mate was alone. The skipper, asleep in his cabin. The moon shone bright along luminous waters. Far astern, a dim shadow upon the glimmery sea rim, lay the Falklands.

A fresh fair wind toward the Horn was too great a temptation, the skipper had changed his mind.

Pointing to the fast disappearing islands, the second mate swore volubly. The mate shrugged his shoulders. Seafowl screamed discordantly. Gathered at the bulwarks, the disappointed apprentices gazed at the land.

"Maybe we'll have fool's luck," growled the second.

"Extra particular ——'s what we'll have," replied the mate.

The stars were frosty. Striking the hours away, the ship's bells seemed a dirge. While the *Twilight* ran southward the mate talked of vessels that had been posted missing, of drowned crews, of wreckage sighted months after the disappearance of battered ship and broken sailors.

My mind and body were numb when I returned to my room at four of the morning. I lighted my little lamp and, seeking I knew not what, opened my sea-chest and fingered the few possessions of a sailor. The voice of the second mate reached me. He was bawling at his watch, now trimming sail for a wind already grown shifty. Muttering shapes passed by my open port. Sails flapped and brace blocks whined. As I listlessly looked upon my worldly goods, the *Twilight* lifted to the first long-sided steep Antarctic swell. I flung down navigation books, a manual of seamanship, a bundle of old letters. I closed my port to shut the drear Horn wind away. I swore at myself for a fool ever to have come to sea.

A package fell from an inner pocket of my shore suit—a little red book, leather-bound. From beyond my port came the harsh shouting of the second mate and, hauling on the braces, his watch cried dismally. Trembling to the upwash of a rising sea, the *Twilight* heeled over. The freshening breeze thrummed in her top-hamper.

I had slept some three hours when an apprentice of the second mate's watch burst into my room.

"All hands, sir!" he shouted.

I leaped from my warm bunk, dragged sea-boots and oilskins on and rushed to the deck.

Pandemonium again. Our fine fair wind was gone. A gale howled from the westerly. The pitch of the Horn!

"Ai—ai—ai, ai—ai—aieee!" cried a sailor at the braces, singing out that his fellows might all pull together.

"Haul, sons, haul!" the second bellowed, and hauling with them, forehand, cheered them on—

"Show us a sailor!"

Heartened a little by his bold example, the crew took up their leader's cry, their

voices mingling with the wild wind's wailing.

"Ai—ai—ai! Ai—ai—aieee!"

"*Oooooo — looooooo — ooooo — looooooo!*" the west wind hooted.

A man stumbled against me and I seized and dragged him to the rigging.

"Get up! Get up!" I yelled.

Wind drowned my voice. Ripped to ribbons, a sail threshed in the gloom above. Ribbons of sail whipped our ascending forms, lashed at our down-bent faces. Wind and rain beat on us as we swarmed aloft. Far below, the sea-tops lifted angry storm-flung heads.

At daybreak the ship was forlorn, with rags of canvas streaming on the tempest. We hacked the rags away. Rain changed to snow. Snow hid the sea. Our knuckles red and broken by frozen rope and sail, we were wet to the bone, our sea-boots full of icy water.

"Haul, sons, haul! Come on, now! Show us a sailor!"

All day the gale raged. All night, and all another day, and on into another night again, while sprays hid the *Twilight;* while snow hid her; while she swung high across mad mountain summits and crashed to low-moaning cañons of inky gloom between.

"*Oooooo — looooooo — ooooo — looooooo!*" the jeering hurricane hooted.

Dead-eyed, dumb, desperate, the sodden sailors followed where we led. The second mate was hoarse. He cursed no longer. The face of the mate was as the face of a man carven of stone. Snow, rain, hail beat down.

Late in the second night the wind lulled. The moon broke through torn cloud-banks in the east. The skipper's whistle skirled.

"Give her sail!" he roared.

Shifting, hauling around from west into the east, the wind was coming fair. Snow, rain and hail were done.

"Come on! She's bound away, lads!" cheered the second, encouraging shadowy forms that swung aloft to shake the tops'ls out.

At daybreak we gazed upon a grim black shape, stark on the northern sea. Our few old seamen shook bruised fists at it. First-voyage apprentices, and green men on the way to being sailors, shivered. Cape Horn! Through foamy following waters the *Twilight* raced, leaving old Stiff astern.

Vast cloud-banks rolled across the sky. Vast seas rolled after us. At dusk a school of whales gave way to either side. A myriad sea-fowl circled us.

"The hands ain't done so bad," our chief mate said. "The bully beef's the thing!"

DUSK deepened. The skipper was in his chart-room with a Horn chart spread before him.

Nodding to where the skipper sits, the chief mate spoke to me;

"He's taking a long chance. We're going through the Diego Ramirez passage."

"*Oooooo — looooooo — oooooo — looooooo!*" wailed the treacherous north wind at our heels.

Hours passed. We were well nigh through the all too narrow rock-edged sea-lane that lies between the bleak rock islets of Diego Ramirez and the main Horn coast. If the good wind held while the *Twilight* made a few miles more all would be well. We should have sea room wherein to turn and run if a souther came; room to beat southward if the west gales reawakened. We should be clear of the tide rips a-swirl in the narrow waters.

Darkness. The early evening darkness of Cape Horn midwinter.

THE WIND was lulling.

Fast up and down his poop the skipper strode.

"Give her sail! Crowd her along!" he roared.

The wind *must* hold. Else we were trapped. The *Twilight* rolled and pitched like a living thing afraid in that black, tumbling, tide-ripped sea. Sails flapped and banged against the masts. Chains rattled. Ropes thud-thudded.

Tides surged by. The *Twilight* drifted.

Nigh, to the north and east, the Cape Horn coast—the Ildefonso and the Hermite Rocks. Nigh, to the south and east, Diego Ramirez. Too nigh. There was scant room. There was scarce wind enough to give her steering way.

THE BELLS struck the hours away. The mate's eyes were steely. The second mate was mute.

The skipper called the mate, and the mate called to the second and to me. We two went forward together, to gather all the crew. The sea had fallen and the night was hushed. In silence broken only by the low surge of the tides, we herded the *Twilight's* company all aft, up to her poop. Old seamen, storm-battered green men, perplexed apprentices, the carpenter, and whimpering Chinee stood in a waiting, wondering group near the helmsman. No curses now.

Pitch darkness. The mate drew me aside.

"She'll pile ashore at midnight. No bully beef'll help her now."

Silence but for the surge of the tides.

Hours dragged by. The skipper in his chart-room awaited midnight.

THE MATE reached for my hand. "*Shake*," he said, and he, the second mate and I, shook hands.

The bell struck. Six bells. Eleven o'clock. Another hour to live.

The mate thrust his pipe into my hand.

"Get me a fill," said he. "Got to have one more fill," and, taking his old pipe, I went down to my little room.

I opened my sea-chest, seeking tobacco, and found the little red-bound book again. I lifted and opened it; a girl's handwriting on the fly-leaf. Turning the unread pages, I saw a passage marked. A girl's picture watched me, smiling from the bulkhead above my bunk. I read. Sailors read such things little.

> When thou goest through the waters, I will be with thee;
> And through the deep waters, they shall not overflow thee.

I laid the little book down, and unconsciously filled and lighted the mate's pipe. Trembling, I blew out my lamp and returned to the dark poop above.

Minutes dragged on like hours.

The tides were still. A hush lay on the midnight. Somewhere there screamed a solitary bird.

The skipper stepped from the chart-room, and at that instant came a sudden smack of wind, cracking the sails full. The ship quivered and lay over a little.

The skipper roared a quick order. The mates ran, yelling to the watches. Men and apprentices leaped down to the main-deck and flung themselves upon the braces once again.

"Ai—ai—ai, ai—ai—aieeee!

Racing from mast to mast, men with salt-water boils on wrist and knee and ankle, men with raw knuckles and red, wide-split palms, choked back their pain and yelled exultingly. We stumbled and fell and cheered. The sails swung 'round, with sheet and halyard shrieking.

A wakening north wind fanned our eager faces. The moon broke out from low and ink-edged clouds above the mastheads.

"Ten minutes o' this and she'll do!" shouted the mate in my ear.

BLACK shapes lay close on the near sea. We heard the thunder of the Ramirez breakers.

Swiftly the *Twilight* glided away. Slowly the rocks grew dim. The thunder died.

Five, ten, fifteen swift minutes flew. The north wind held, speeding the *Twilight* on. The moon was gone. The night was dark again.

We sheeted the mains'l home.

"Haul! Haul, sons! Show us a sailor!" cried the second mate.

The mate's voice rang along the deck—

"That'll do the watch!"

THE MIDNIGHT bell boomed out. Faint from the focsle-head comes the look-out-man's cry—

"A-l-l-l-l's well, sir!"

The Gritti Luck

A Story of the Sword Gray Maiden Through the Ages

By ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

A LITTLE man in jester's motley looked down from the top of Neri's Tower upon the hulking mass of Castello Gritti, crouched on its promontory like a great stone monster ready to leap from the shadow of the Apennines into the dancing blue waters of the Adriatic. Opposite him, and on a level with his eyes, rose the round bulk of the gate tower, where watchmen moved restlessly in the hot spring sunshine. Below, the life of the fortress droned its normal course; hoofs thudded in the tilt-yard and curses bellowed upward as old Gianni schooled a batch of green men-at-arms. A leisurely clanking and clanging marked the location of forge and smithy; in the forecourt crossbow-bolts whizzed at target-practise. A few sentinels lounged on the walls, and from the green bower of the garden that nestled in their seaward tip came the shrill clamor of a woman's laughter.

The jester skipped lightly to an arrow-slit commanding that side of the castle, an expression of whimsical amusement on his ugly brown face. When he moved, the muscles rippled and bulged under his tight garments, with an effect of power in startling contrast to his diminutive stature.

"*Per Bacco!*" he muttered. "You are no sluggard, Madonna Lisa."

A man's laugh, hoarse, perhaps a trifle tipsy, echoed from the garden.

"Ho-ho, Old One," grinned the jester. "And you—you are as fat in your mind as of your person. They are wily folk in Venice. Trust to the signoria."

The woman's voice rose again in a snatch of song, lilting and amorous; but the jester's attention was distracted by a stir among the watchmen on the gate tower. They pointed southward along the white ribbon of the Coast Road which looped and coiled between the foothills and the shore, and the jester had no difficulty in identifying the object of their curiosity—a sparkling clump of lance-points, poised momentarily on one of the elevations in the road.

The jester pursed his lips in a soundless whistle.

"Home rides Guido—and halts to look to sea! Can Young Nicolo be on the way as well?"

He shaded his eyes and peered keenly southeast across the sapphire-blue expanse of the Adriatic. Yes, far, far off, on the utmost horizon, the sunlight was reflected from the square sail of a galley. The vessel itself was yet invisible, but the little man in motley imagined how it skimmed the waves like a multi-legged dragon, oars swinging, whips cracking on the naked backs of the slaves. Always in a hurry, Young Nicolo, in his calm, imperturbable fashion.

A race, eh? Guido's men-at-arms galloping north on the road as Young Nicolo drove his galley for the landing-cove inside the fish-hook bends of the promontory, just beneath the garden where Madonna Lisa was now laughing again as if some tremendous sport was forward, and Old Nicolo was gurgling and grunting and apparently—if that waving of branches meant anything— pursuing her clumsily.

The little jester laughed, in his turn.

"A family reunion, signori! *Per Baccho*, what affection! All of us together—Madonna Lisa, the Old One, Young Nicolo, Black Guido—and me! Yes, forget not Ciutazzo, magnificent signori. The Gritti, the signoria and the emperor! Ho-ho, all but the Po— Now, may the devil fly off with me! Who is this?"

From the foothills inland a second road debouched to join the Coast Road at the miserable village which huddled at the base of the promontory on which the castle stood. Down this road strode a single figure, bare-footed, bare-legged, dusty brown robe flapping at his heels, cowl thrown back to expose sunburned face and tonsure.

"A most purposeful monk," commented the jester. "How he strides! No wanton, wandering, pilfering shaveling, this fellow. Not he! He goes upon an errand—hitherward. Yes, hitherward, beyond a doubt. And that errand can be but the one. But it is too excellent a contrivance for credibility. It would round out the picture. We should have completeness. And why not? Why not, I ask, *per Baccho*? Shall the Holy Father be excluded from the board? Impiety! So shall Ciutazzo sharpen his wits, and win to—win to—Now, what i' Mary's name *shall* I win to?"

He rubbed his clean-shaven chin and pondered the question, then skipped with his peculiar airy ease of motion toward the trap which opened on the tower stair.

"Time enough to think of that," he decided. "I'll consult the Gritti Luck. Yes, yes, that will be best. Let the Luck decide!"

II

THE WARDERS in the gateway laughed uproariously as Ciutazzo turned a somersault into their midst, with a merry jingling of the tiny hawk's bells which edged his garments. A frown showed on the dour features of the friar, whose interrogation was so abruptly interrupted.

"How now, brown brother?" exclaimed the jester. "There is dust on your feet; there is sweat on your brow. You have traveled far. Who are you? Whence come you? Whither go you? Are you for Pope or emperor? Milan, Venice, Genoa, Padua, Pisa? Your own man or abbot's man? Pilgrim or beggar or—"

The friar's face hardened. It was a stern face, square-jawed, with close-set lips and eyes that burned steadily.

"I am called Fra Pietro," he said shortly. "I am of the Minorites. I travel upon God's business."

Ciutazzo peered vacuously at him. Gone the shrewdness, the alert intelligence, which had characterized him when alone. He seemed almost pertly ignorant.

"A Minorite," he babbled. "One of the flock of the blessed Francis, eh? But you haven't the look of your brethren, Fra Pietro. A scurvy lot—dirty, withal—forever whining and thirsty."

"You talk of your betters," Fra Pietro answered contemptuously. And turned to the warders, "Must I waste time with

this jingle-jangle fool? I asked for your lord."

One of the warders bowed, humorously apologetic.

"If you would see Old Nicolo, let Dog-face be your usher, good brother. He has our lord's ear. A mighty droll fellow."

The friar's hot eyes stabbed into Ciutazzo's.

"Ah, yes, there is none can make Old Nicolo laugh like me," the jester babbled on. "Come with Ciutazzo. I know where he takes his pleasure. I know how to approach him. Ah, yes, and I know what he plots and schemes. Who better than Ciutazzo? Ciutazzo, who makes him laugh when the black moods are on him and who waves his bauble between Young Nicolo and Guido when their swords are half-drawn! *Per Baccho*, there is none in casa Gritti knows more than I, brown brother."

"Christ's truth," swore a warder.

"Loose talk," reproved the friar. "Our Lord God's name in vain, and a heathen oath! You show no grace, you of the Gritti's folk."

The warders scowled, and Ciutazzo intervened quickly.

"Why, as to that, brown brother, no priest stays long with us, and those who have come wrought little good. What with the slayings and burnings and wenchings and stealings and—"

A warder coughed warningly. Fra Piertro crossed himself.

"Where the devil sows I plough," he said. "Come, Ciutazzo. Show me to Lord Nicolo."

The jester turned a back-somersault, landing expertly on his feet.

"Follow, brown brother," he directed. "I'll take you to him. He's in the garden—with Madonna Lisa." A vacant grin distorted the gnarled features. "Perhaps there'll be work for you to do—a wedding, eh? But that's not his way. Not of late years. We take, but we wed not, we of Castello Gritti."

The warders chuckled covertly, but Fra Pietro kept silent until he and his guide were in the tree-shaded forecourt, behind the line of crossbowmen practising at the butts ranged against the opposite stable wall.

"You have been here long?" the priest inquired then.

"I? *Per Baccho*— Oh, pardon, brother! I meant to say no. I came last year about this time. They gave me food and clothes. I make them laugh, keep Old Nicolo from slaying his sons, his sons from cutting each other's throats. We are all content. So I stay."

"The devil's own, these Gritti," murmured the friar. "But who is Madonna Lisa?"

Ciutazzo stole a glance at the iron face of the man beside him.

"She whom the signoria sent," he prattled. "Did you know? Everybody—"

"The signoria?" broke in Fra Pietro. "You mean Venice? The doge's council?"

"Who else? Old Nicolo was there a month since, selling some of the plunder, and a great lord—oh, belike it was the doge, himself!—gave her to him. A fine sleek wench, brown brother. Red-haired, but a thought too plump for my fancy, and—"

"And what do his sons say to this?" pressed the friar.

"Oh, they curse and quarrel and tell him he is old and worthless. But if he gives them the chance—ho-ho-ho! hee-hee-hee! Watch them, brown brother! Just watch them! *Per Baccho*, Young Nicolo has looked at her more than once. He has an eye for her kind. And Guido, he fears her because—because—"

He appeared to flounder awkwardly, in doubt whether he should continue what he had been about to say.

"Yes, yes," Fra Pietro prompted him. "Go on! Go on! Why should Guido fear her?"

The pair had reached the top of the ascent from the forecourt to the upper range of buildings. Over the landward walls might be seen the hazy skyline of the Apennines.

Fra Pietro's hand, a large, calloused, powerful hand, clutched the jester's arm.

"You hurt me, brown brother," Ciutazzo

reproved him gravely, and the friar relaxed his grip, in his preoccupation failing to note that his fingers had been able scarcely to dent the jester's mesh of muscles.

"But you have not answered me," chided Fra Pietro. "Why should Guido fear Madonna Lisa?"

The jester glanced cautiously around them.

"Why, you see," he confided, "she is for Venice, eh? And Guido, he—he is for—"

"Whom? The emperor?"

Ciutazzo shook his head.

"Not he! He leans toward the Holy Father."

Something that might have been a sigh escaped the friar's lips.

"And Young Nicolo?" he asked. "Is he, too, for our Holy Father?"

Ciutazzo snickered.

"You know not the Gritti, brown brother. No, no! What one is for the other is against."

"Ah, then, Young Nicolo is for the emperor?"

"I said it not, for I know it not." The jester swelled out his chest with a comic travesty of pride. "He keeps his own counsel, does Young Nicolo."

"But he is not for Venice?"

Ciutazzo considered this.

"Most likely not. For then he must agree with his father—and he would almost as soon agree with Guido as with Old Nicolo. Oh, a brave den of wolves! Hands always on sword-hilts, teeth always bared, a curse on every tongue."

He started to enter a wide, arched doorway but Fra Pietro restrained him, gazing out across the forecourt and the land walls at the vista of the hills.

"It is a fair place, jester."

"And a strong," agreed Ciutazzo, his puckered eyes intent on the friar's. "The old Romans built it, men say, and this I know—that all men crave it today. Young Nicolo's galley levies tribute at sea, and Black Guido's men-at-arms take toll of all who travel on the Coast Road. Ah, nobody can pass by Castello Gritti. In Venice they call it the key to the Adriatic. The emperor says who sits here might pour troops as he would into the south. And the Pope—"

"Never mind the Pope," Fra Pietro rebuked harshly. "It is not for vermin such as you to speak lightly of him who holds Peter's keys, who sits as God's vice-gerent on earth."

"An uncommon warm seat he has, brown brother," quoth the jester.

And when the priest glowered at him he gave back a step and added innocently:

"But that is what all say! He and the emperor are forever at each other, just like Young Nicolo and Black Guido. And the Venetians flout him and the other cities ignore him and in Rome the nobles brawl on his doorstep. Why many's the Pope has been in fear of his life in Rome!"

He waxed confidential.

"Now, you have the look of a great man to me, brown brother. Yes, yes, *per Baccho*, you might be a lord cardinal. You might be Pope yourself! But if I were you—"

"I have not asked your advice," exclaimed Fra Pietro. "You are to lead me to Lord Nicolo."

"At once, at once," the jester fawned eagerly. "This way. Through the hall and then—"

His tongue clacking on, he secretly hugged himself with satisfaction.

"Touch, that time!" he recorded. "You are not what you seem, Fra Pietro. Nor are you concerned for our souls. Tonsured you may be, but you would not be the first churchman who could survey the strong points of a hold. What's toward? Is this the day I've waited for? Shall we scatter the pieces on the board and play at chess like the emperor and his knights? A brave pastime! But be wary, Dogface. Be humble."

III

THE HALL was a wide and lofty chamber, two rows of pillars down middle and at the end a dais of stone the backed by a fireplace and carven chimney-piece in front of which were placed a

long table and half a dozen chairs of state. But what caught the friar's eye—and held it—was a mystical gray shimmer of steel, slanting across the chimney-piece.

"The Gritti Luck," he murmured.

"You have heard of it?" the jester queried softly.

"Who has not?" countered Fra Pietro, and swiftly traversed the empty chamber,

ascending the dais as one accustomed to his own way.

"Ha," commented Ciutazzo, "you sit above the salt, brown brother!"

Fra Pietro checked himself, and a mask of humility settled upon his features.

"A poor friar, without wealth or ambition, may walk without fear of temptation, jester," he answered in a tone of mild rebuke. "Surely, there is none here my curiosity may harm."

"None," Ciutazzo agreed whimsically. "But you will not accuse *me* of curiosity if I say you are the first friar I ever saw interested in a sword."

"There is much you have not seen," retorted the friar.

"There you have me," admitted Ciutazzo, executing a little prancing step. "And what do you make of it, brown brother?"

Fra Pietro peered up at the long straight blade, with its plain steel hilt. The light from several narrow windows, high up in the west wall, bathed the chimney-piece in radiance and showed clearly the strange series of letters, signs and symbols etched and bitten and scratched in the sword's flat surface.

"There is more writing on the other side—against the stones," remarked the jester.

But the friar paid no attention to him, spelling slowly the lowermost of the visible inscriptions:

Li demoyzel griz
Ma vengance je priz.

"It is a French blade, then," he muttered to himself.

Ciutazzo goggled at him comically.

"A friar who reads!" wondered the jester. "A very monk! But you are wrong, brown brother. That may be French, that writing, but the sword is older than France or Italy. There is Latin on it. There is Greek on it. There is Arabic—or so said the Saracen hakim from Palermo who bled Old Nicolo the last time he overate himself. Yes, and there are tongues no man can put a name to. It is as old as life, I think."

The friar stared up at the lean, shimmering mystery of the sword—and presently looked away, as the reflection of the sunlight in the gray whorls dazzled him.

"As old as evil!" he growled.

"As old as death, more likely," replied the jester.

And the gravity of the tone drew a sudden, penetrating glance from Fra Pietro. Ciutazzo giggled inanely.

"And that would be as old as the Gritti, eh?" he ruminated aloud. "For they are lords of death—oh, very proper signori! At least, since Old Nicolo's grandfather won the sword at dice. He—the grandfather, old Annibaldo, you know—was expelled from Venice—killing a doge's son or some little trick of that kind—and fled to France. He was down to his last byzant when he won Gray Maiden here from a Provençal knight in a main that ran all night in the bishop's guardroom at Carcassonne.

"His luck changed from that day. He made a pile of ransom money, raised his own company, hired out to the Florentines, sold them to the Milanese, deserted to the Holy Father—who, they tell me, paid him in indulgences rather than coin—not that he didn't need them, *per Bacchol*—and took this place by treachery from the Chiessi, who probably had it by the same means from whoever sat here before them. And old Annibaldo bade his son consider Gray Maiden the luck of the Gritti. The "Luck of the Gritti" she has been ever since; they won't even carry her in battle. Oh, no, she hangs there on the wall, and if they don't say mass to her it isn't for want of respect."

The friar crossed himself.

"Heathen superstition! It is sufficient to jeopardize the souls of all within these walls."

"Humph," commented Ciutazzo, "I know not as to their souls, but I am certain their bodies would be jeopardized if aught happened to the sword. The Gritti would be as fearful as any man-at-arms—they, who with it are arrogant as princes!"

"Yet they seek alliance with the Venetians," objected Fra Pietro, his eyes darting sidewise at the jester.

"Not Young Nicolo—or Guido, either! Young Nicolo says the Gritti need no alliance with folk who must pay tribute to them in any case. Trust to the Luck, says he. Guido—saving your presence, brown brother—says to —— with Venice! If we traffic with any overlord, let it be the Pope."

"He speaks wisely," the friar said warmly.

"Wisely? In sooth, yes!" Ciutazzo's homely visage was entirely vacant. "The Pope, says Guido, is an old woman, who can not compel us to anything we dislike; but we might always have occasion to wring favors from him—for which we need pay little. So he plumps for the Pope."

Fra Pietro crossed himself again.

"The brood of Satan! And the emperor—does none speak for him?"

The jester pondered the question.

"Why, there is Young Nicolo. He is not for the emperor. He is for Young Nicolo. But I suppose he would sooner be for the emperor than for his father's Venice or Guido's Pope."

"Infidel that he is!" cried the friar. "All infidels! Such as they are no better than the sons of Mahound. Hell gapes wide for them."

"That is as may be," Ciutazzo observed impartially. "We hear sorry tales of you churchmen. And the Gritti are not likely to come to harm while they have the Luck. After all, they are no worse than Ruggieri, who bred Old Nicolo, or Annibaldo, who bred Ruggieri. Stout swordsmen, sly enemies, hardy wenchers!"

Fra Pietro studied the jester's hazel eyes that held a peculiar hidden glow buried deep beneath their childish twinkle.

"Strange no man has stolen the Luck," he remarked. "It might be thought—

"Many have tried," chuckled Ciutazzo, "and all have died."

And added inconsequentially—

"There are serving-folk watching us this moment."

"St. Paul!" the friar exclaimed involuntarily. "You distort my meaning, Dogface. Guard your tongue!"

"Ah, but my tongue is privileged," chuckled Ciutazzo. "None so privileged as I in Castello Gritti. I jest with Old Nicolo. Come, I'll take you to him—in the garden where he toys with Madonna Lisa. Hee-hee-hee! They were clever, the Venetians. The Madonna, she has a surer grip on Old Nicolo than much gold would have bought them. But wait until Guido rides in! Wait until Young Nicolo is up from the cove! Wait until the supper wine is served! Ho-ho-ho!"

He leaped into the air with a jingling of bells and danced a few steps, preening himself like a peacock on a lawn.

"Only wait, brown brother! Ciutazzo is a rare showman. And first, I will show you Old Nicolo at his ease. Speak him gently. He is quick, for all his fat—and what is a friar to him? Ho-ho-ho! What indeed?"

Fra Pietro shuddered despite himself.

"You have a foul tongue, Dogface," he rebuked, "privileged or no. Lead on."

IV

OLD NICOLO'S enormous body bulged out of a creaking arm-chair. He sat in front of a green tangle of olive trees in a shady corner of the garden, where the seawind blew through an opening in the walls. His little squinty eyes were veiled by the fat buttresses of his cheeks and a thick mat of beard, scarcely shot with gray. His mouth was a red slash, studded with stubby white teeth. A beaked nose, netted over with crimson veins, jutted predatorily from his swollen face. On one velvet-clad knee he poised a golden flagon of wine. A great, square hand, its strength concealed under layers of fat, stroked the red curls of Madonna Lisa who sat on a stool against his knees, twanging at a gittern.

"So it is to have strong sons," he was saying. "Why should I work, who have reared them these many years? No, no, this is my time of ease. Work them, Madonna, work them so that they sweat! So I'll keep them from conspiring against me. Make them hate each other always—favor one, then the other—whisper tales, eh? Tell one the other says— But what's this, Ciutazzo? You come unannounced, with a stranger?"

Ciutazzo executed a caper, and made pretense of kissing one of Madonna Lisa's hands.

"No stranger, Lord Nicolo," denied the jester. "A brother in God, yes, a brown brother. The holy Fra Pietro, who was faring past and thought he would tarry to inquire for the state of your Magnificence's soul and pass a mite of gossip withal. I met him at the gate and plucked him hither. Was I not kind? Was I not thoughtful?"

Fra Pietro bowed stiffly, folding his hands on his chest. Madonna Lisa pouted. She was, as Ciutazzo had described her, buxom of person, full-busted, languorous, moulded in ample curves, her skin a perfect blend of pink and white hues, her hair tortured by chemicals to an unnaturally vivid red. The true type of Venetian beauty.

"Only a priest, Dogface!" she protested. "From all your pother I had expected entertainment."

"I am content," spoke up Old Nicolo, with a sly gleam in his pig-eyes. "And you must be content with me, Madonna. God wot, there is enough of me!"

His paunch waggled to the rhythm of his laughter.

"Whither go you, priest?" he challenged curtly.

"On God's business," Fra Pietro responded in the same phrase he had employed with the jester.

"That means nothing," said Old Ni-Nicolo. "Whence come you?"

"From Rome."

"So! You travel for your order?"

"In part, lord."

"Ah! And in part—"

"I bear messages from the Holy Father to those of his supporters on my way," returned the friar, seeming to conquer a certain reluctance.

"By my Luck, I do not question that!" proclaimed Old Nicolo. "And I doubt not, too, that you make report of what you see on the way."

"A traveler's tales always find hearers," evaded Fra Pietro.

"I have known it to be so," the fat man agreed ironically. "How were matters in Rome when you left?"

The friar twisted his hands in the cord bound about his waist, choosing his words carefully, speaking deliberately.

"The Holy Father is still in health; not so hale as some might wish—"

"Nor so pindling as many of my lord cardinals could desire," burst in Old Nicolo, contorting his huge face in a satyr's grin.

Madonna Lisa laughed shrilly. Ciutazzo pranced and jangled his bells.

"How if Fra Pietro be a lord cardinal?" he demanded. "Look to the sternness of him, Lord Nicolo! Look to the air with which he comports himself!"

Old Nicolo squinted malevolently at the friar, who denied hastily:

"May Christ forgive the wastrel his loose talk! I a cardinal? Lord, a cardinal does not walk the highways in brown robe and bare feet. I am a humble brother of the Minorites—the rule of St. Francis."

"So!" grunted Old Nicolo. "Perhaps you speak truth—albeit, if so, you are the first friar of that stamp ever I saw. Well, well! And what of Rome? The Holy Father is in health. Hath neither overeaten nor overdrunken, eh? And how go his affairs with the emperor?"

The friar's face darkened appreciably.

"That tool of the Evil One!" he barked. "God pity one so distraught. There can be no pity on earth. He labors still in the mire of confusion, heedless of God's commands, selfish, wilful, ignoring the needs of Christendom."

"He'll not go on the crusade?" Old Nicolo prompted dryly.

"He evades, lord. One day he says one thing, another—"

"And the cities? The princes?"

Fra Pietro shrugged his shoulders.

"It is as always. They consult their own ends."

"And rightly," approved Old Nicolo.

"There are more ends than one for each of us," the friar said slowly. "Bethink you, lord, he who scorns the Holy Father merits ill of God, whose—"

Madonna Lisa smote a chord upon her gittern—a jolly, mocking chord.

"He prates like Black Guido," she cried.

"So he does," assented Old Nicolo. "You waste breath upon me, priest."

Fra Pietro drew a step nearer.

"Lord Nicolo," he began earnestly, "there is more than heavenly vantage for those who aid the Holy Father. What prince of Christendom is greater? Year by year the power of Rome increases, and the day shall dawn when all the world owns the sway of the one ruler—of him who rules in the name of God, who holds Peter's keys!"

Old Nicolo yawned.

"I am for amusement, friar. You were not bidden to preach."

"Perhaps I buy and sell," Fra Pietro answered significantly.

Again Madonna Lisa smote her gittern, and the plump fingers of one hand fastened upon Old Nicolo's mighty fist.

"A friar to speak of buying and selling with the Gritti!" she scorned.

"The fellow merits flogging!" boomed her master. "What, fellow? Have you a message for me? If so, speak it. If not, begone!"

Ciutazzo heard the clank of armor behind them. So did the friar, who stiffened.

"Here is Guido," cried the jester.

Fra Pietro relaxed.

"Lord Nicolo," said he in proud humility, "I am a poor friar and of no account by myself, but it is true that I travel upon the Holy Father's affairs, which are God's affairs—"

"With that some of us beg leave to differ," interjected Old Nicolo.

A gigantic figure, all shining in black mail, a black torrent of beard pouring from the opened visor down upon the

cuirass, strode into the garden. Black eyes blazed ferociously in a swart face; a cruel mouth was pressed close. Huge, like his father, but with none of his father's fat, Guido was both similar and dissimilar to Old Nicolo. He walked slowly, ponderously, trampling a flower in his path rather than turn aside.

Ciutazzo skipped out of his way, jingling merrily, laughing into Madonna Lisa's startled eyes.

"My brother is not returned?" Guido asked harshly.

"Not yet," answered his father.

Guido stared from one to the other of them.

"Who is this priest?" he demanded.

The friar named himself, preserving the appearance of self-sufficiency which had impressed Ciutazzo.

"He is from Rome," amended Old Nicolo a thought sourly. "A messenger. The Pope would buy us. That was what he said, eh, Dogface? He buys and sells."

"I will talk to him," said Guido.

Old Nicolo's eyes gleamed savagely.

"I am the chief of the Gritti," he warned. "It is my word which carries!"

Guido glanced sneeringly at the woman at his father's feet.

"If I sell the Gritti, I sell them for more than a strumpet," he replied.

"By my Luck!" Old Nicolo started up, hurling Madonna Lisa aside as brutally as Guido might have done. "You'll not talk so to me, boy! Not while my word runs!"

Ciutazzo danced airily between them.

"Peace, peace, signori," he commanded. "Shall we brawl? Must we mishandle lovesome ladies? And in face of Holy Church? *Per Baccho*, signori, all Italy is rent with war! In Castello Gritti, alone, is peace. And what do I hear? Hark! Who comes next?"

He halted, and as his bells jingled into silence all heard the rattling of oars below in the cove, the cracking of whips, the harsh, panting grunts of the galley-slaves— "Ha! Hoo-oo! Huh!"—veering the craft in to its moorings. An order was shouted, repeated, and men's feet pattered on planks.

"Young Nicolo," said the jester. "Soon the party will be complete, signori."

Old Nicolo extended a massive arm to Madonna Lisa, cowering on the ground by his empty chair.

"Up with you, sweeting," he ordered gruffly. "I'll not quarrel with these devils I begot unthinking."

He dropped into the chair, and she sank beside him in her former position, darting a single stab of hatred from under her heavy lashes at Guido's lowering form.

Old Nicolo pointed a menacing forefinger at his son.

"Mark you, boy!" he thundered. "You are no lamb and I am no ram, but there are marches to my patience. You to your diversions, I to mine. And the policies of the Gritti are my concern. I do not push my head between the shields of Pope and emperor. Let other fools be crushed to cream-cheese if they will; I sit back and pluck what comes under my nose. And while I live I rule here!"

Guido's jaw squared angrily.

"Yes—while you live," he answered. "Come, friar, I have somewhat to say to you."

Fra Pietro hesitated, with more of nervousness than he had yet revealed. Old Nicolo grinned wickedly.

"Go with him, friar. Tell him all you know. Offer him all you can pay. It will serve you ill, and harm me none."

"But what of Ciutazzo?" cried the jester. "Who will serve Ciutazzo? Belike, signori, you will all serve him—all serve Dogface, who makes you laugh."

He waved his hand to Madonna Lisa, who smiled at him without mirth and danced away amongst the bushes. *Tinkle-tinkle*, rang his bells. *Jingle-jangle!* Fainter, fainter. But he was not gone. Ensconced behind the trunk of a centuries-old olive-tree, he spied upon the grass-plot where Old Nicolo sat, head bent to Madonna Lisa's ear, while both eyed intently the disappearing backs of Guido and Fra Pietro.

"There was poison in her look," whispered the jester to himself.

"Yes, and there is poison in the cock of the Old One's head. Lords of death! They are like serpents, twining and twisting, striking their venom into each other. Hatred is the one emotion they know—hatred and lust. Walk warily, Dogface. Be humble."

He stole quietly from the garden, planting his feet deliberately, clutching his bell-hung garments lest their silvery voices betray him. At a door behind the dais in the hall he peered around a curtain's edge to where Fra Pietro sat at the high table close by Guido's elbow.

"What is a single fief?" the friar was saying. "What is it to be a simple baron, lord of one castle, however strong? The Holy Father is generous, Lord Guido. He can afford to be, for he holds all Christendom in fee, and those he favors—"

Ciutazzo chuckled.

"Poison," he whispered. "I smell it. It is in the air. Men speak it—and breathe it. Even I! But who dies last? Dogface? Ha, that is the question! Who dies last?"

AT THE water-gate the jester encountered Young Nicolo, breathing easily, despite the steep ascent from the cove. A splendid figure, Young Nicolo, sinewy limbs clothed in green velvet, a green cap with a yellow feather on his blue-black hair that was cut at the line of his clean-shaven jaw. Splendid, yet sinister. Yellow cat's eyes that met every scrutiny with a blank glare, face that mirrored cruelty, for all its grace of contour. Tall and lithe and shapely he was, and men feared Young Nicolo most of the Gritti; they could never be sure of him. He was reserved where his father and Guido were loud-mouthed, kept a grip on his temper and killed without so much as a curse by way of warning.

"What sport, Ser Nicolo?" hailed the jester.

Young Nicolo ignored the question.

"My brother?" he asked shortly.

"He rode in an hour since," replied Ciutazzo. And added casually, "Hard on the friar's heels."

A flicker of interest showed in Young Nicolo's stony gaze.

"What friar?"

"From Rome, lord. He talks of the Pope and the war."

"With my brother?"

"They sit at the high table."

There was no sign of interest now in Young Nicolo's features; but the atmosphere was charged with a psychic tension which warned the jester of the rising storm of hatred in Nicolo's heart.

"My father?" he asked.

"The Lord Nicolo is in the garden," Ciutazzo answered charily.

"With—her?"

The jester nodded, fascinated by the conflict he sensed in the other's breast.

Young Nicolo looked out to sea, not a nerve or muscle quivering in his handsome face. When he spoke again he affected to be immersed in the view.

"You see everything, Ciutazzo. You are privy to all that goes on in Castello Gritti. Why do you stay here?"

"I was hungry, lord. I have a roof—and food and drink."

"You could earn as much elsewhere."

"I do not think the Old One would let me go," said Ciutazzo simply. "But I am content."

"Where did you come from?"

Young Nicolo directed the full force of his yellow eyes upon the jester's, and Ciutazzo made no attempt to evade the inspection.

"But that is known to you, Lord," he protested. "I am a stroller. All Italy is my home."

"You have a Saracen look to you," charged the other.

Ciutazzo spread out his hands; his features settled into lines of friendly stupidity.

"I can remember Palermo, Ser Nicolo. But that was when I was very young."

"And you have never seen the emperor?"

Almost the jester smiled, but twisted his lips in time into a grotesque grimace.

"Ah, yes! On his horse once, a-hawking. And again, when he rode with his knights to the north."

Young Nicolo's manner became subtly threatening.

"And do you suppose you could find a means of approaching so august a person, Dogface?" he inquired.

For two or three breaths Ciutazzo locked his eyes with that menacing stare. Then he nodded blandly.

"But yes, lord. A jester may go anywhere."

"Even to the emperor?"

"Well, lord, you should know better than I, who am only a poor fellow," the jester answered reasonably. "But I have heard the emperor's court is a fine place for entertainments, so I make no doubt all folk of my persuasion are received there."

"If I could trust you!" muttered Young Nicolo.

"Why not, lord?"

"And why?" returned Young Nicolo. "I trust no man. If I use you, Dogface, it will be because you fear me. Remember!"

"And when do I go?" questioned Ciutazzo, capering joyfully.

But he froze into servility at the first glare from the yellow eyes

"I have not said you shall go anywhere!" snapped Young Nicolo. "I have no occasion for curious servants. Put a buckle on your tongue or I'll have it out and send you to an oar in the galley."

He paused.

"Be within call this evening," he went on. "Near the dais—within the crook of my finger. And keep silence."

"Yes, lord! Oh, yes, Ser Nicolo. Ciutazzo—"

"I said, 'Silence!' " cautioned Young Nicolo, and faded into the passage leading to the living-quarters, his footsteps falling as delicately as a cat's, his head bent in thought.

Ciutazzo hugged himself.

" 'Silence,' quoth he. There'll not long be silence, signori! The Old One playing for Venice, Guido harkening to the Pope and Young Nicolo conning his profits with the emperor. And Dogface? What of Dogface? A brave *condottiere* you'd make, *per Bacchol* There's two can run your course, Ser Nicolo. But watch the Madonna, lad. She'll set the tune. Always a woman to set the tune!"

VI

LIGHT streamed down upon the dais from a dozen lamps, Byzantine and Saracen work, and to the shocked amazement of Fra Pietro tall altar-candles burned at intervals in the depths of the hall where a myriad shadows played hide-and-seek across the stolen tapestries that draped the walls. Ciutazzo, crouched on the dais floor in a dark corner, his arms clasped around his knees, kept his ears attentive to the snarling debate at the high table, but his eyes were concerned with the flooding shadow-play and the mystic radiance of the gray sword that hung above the fireplace.

Sometimes the sword would seem to disappear, swallowed up in darkness as a draft sent the light eddying roofward or hurled a wave of shadows to submerge it. Again, it would dominate the room, shining out upon the wall with an evil luster as uncanny as the spiritual wickedness which radiated from the Gritti who brawled beneath it. And another time Ciutazzo thought it flared among the shadows, half-seen, half-hidden, like a shy maid, averse to overmuch attention. But even as he watched the light smote it once more and it flared hardly, a streak of power, lean as Young Nicolo, brutal as Black Guido, sly as their father—but more, much more, instinct with a strength that was timeless, limitless, inhuman.

The jester blinked up at it.

"What is life to you, Gray Maiden?" he ruminated. "Ha! What is flesh to steel? Something to hack, eh? And men think you are but a tool. I wonder! How often have you urged the blow? How often did you prompt the deed? *Per Baccho,* as I watch you, you lure me—to—what?"

He cocked an ear toward the table.

"Patience, Dogface. This is a matter can not be hurried. Yes, yes, he who lets sword or greed or wench give him the spur, he strives for him who waits. Who dies last? That's the question."

The argument waxed louder. Madonna Lisa long since had fled. Fra Pietro, in no wise embarrassed by the seat at the high table Guido had allotted him, was yet disturbed at the yelling and bellowing of Old Nicolo and Guido. Young Nicolo spoke seldom, and then in measured accents. Occasionally the friar sought to mediate, and inevitably the conflict became the more bitter thereby, Young Nicolo grinning tigerishly and prodding both to renewed assaults whenever they revealed signs of flagging animosity.

"Bah, you are a wineskin, not a man!" fumed Guido. "What have you ever done—"

"Ever done?" roared his father. "I reared a viper in you, boy! And I maintained the Gritti in the fear of all Italy. You'll never do the same."

"You sold yourself to the Venetians—for what? A woman, a strumpet, a harlot, a—"

Old Nicolo pounded his dagger-hilt on the table.

"There are limits my own son may not pass!" he cried. "And it is not true I sold aught to the signoria."

Young Nicolo struck in.

"You had naught of them, Old One?"

"Not a ducat."

"Only that red-haired—"

Young Nicolo interrupted Guido.

"Why do you think Lisa was given you?" he asked, mildly venomous. "Because your friends in the signoria admire you? Would serve you? Because you are a fine figure of a man? Because she demanded to come?"

"You talk foolishly," swaggered Old Nicolo. "She was a bribe—and not the first I've accepted, with my tongue pouched where it belongs—in my cheek."

"A bribe," repeated Young Nicolo. "Yes, a bribe! And what do you think she does here—besides cozening you? How much do you think the signoria knows of our garrison and stores, of the way we operate, of the castle approaches? She is no innocent! She could bribe a guard, open a gate—"

"I was not born yesterday, boy," fussed his father. "By my Luck, you talk like a child! Is it amusement you begrudge me? Are you jealous?"

Laughter dripped coldly from Young Nicolo's lips.

"Jealous? Yes, of being sold to a master I despise—of being sold to any master, for that matter."

"The Venetians are masters!" exclaimed Guido. "They would own us, body and soul. We should be pandered to for a while. Then—zut! Some day there'd be treachery, and the Gritti—"

He drew an expressive finger across his throat.

"But the Pope! Ah, there is an ally for you, easy to serve, generous—"

"You have learned your lesson well, Guido," mocked his brother, with a meaning eye upon Fra Pietro.

The friar accepted the challenge.

"Call the Pope master, lord," he said boldly. "Why run from the truth? The Holy Father is master, not only of Italy, but all Christendom. But he is a kindly master, appreciative—"

"And forever bleating that the emperor disdains him or is disrespectful," gibed Young Nicolo. "He can not compel even the Romans to respect him. And you would have the Gritti become his men! Not I! If I took a master he should be strong enough to make me fear him."

"What of the signoria, then?" demanded his father. "Venice is feared. Where will you find a state—"

"A city of merchants!" scoffed Young Nicolo. "And what is Venice compared with the emperor?"

"Or the Pope?" exclaimed Guido. "Venice is out of it, I say. Italy is torn betwixt Guelph and Ghibelline, betwixt Pope and emperor. The emperor is a mighty prince—none mightier—save one. The Pope is more than prince. His dominion stretches into heaven and hell.

His power is over souls as well as bodies. His—"

Old Nicolo gaped scornfully.

"That a son of mine should prate like any shaveling!" he growled. "You are an apt scholar, Guido. If this is how you grow, lapping up priest's chatter, gabbling of souls and heaven and the —— knows what, by my Luck, it is well we have the sword there to hold up our fortunes! I can see you are not the man to further us."

All four at the table followed his forefinger to the slim blade of the sword over the fireplace. The light was rippling the length of the gray steel, making it ruddy as warm blood—and Fra Pietro crossed himself, as if he sensed the evil Ciutazzo also felt.

"If you trust in the Luck, why treat with any prince or power?" asked Young Nicolo.

His father's big, blunt finger came down like a lance in rest.

"I am older than you, boys. I can see that the days I have known are past. The cities are growing stronger; the nobles are joining one faction or another. But I would not commit myself any more than I must. The emperor and the Pope are too big for me; they could bide their times, and at the right moment gobble us in one bite. But Venice would be different. The signoria—"

"They'd treat us as you predict," rumbled Guido. "And what honor is there in acting as castellans for a crew of merchant-traders?"

"I am of the one mind with Guido there," drawled Young Nicolo. "But what honor is there in buying titles from a dawdling old priest, who lacks the guts of a man-at-arms? We might be princes under the Pope. I'd rather be a count under the emperor if we must hoist another banner beside our's."

Fra Pietro's face flamed wrathfully, but Guido took up the cudgels for him.

"And what advantage would we win from allegiance to the emperor? The Venetians are north of us, their galleys are always at sea. Across the Apennines is Rome, and the Holy Father has allies on every hand. The emperor is south in Sicily when he isn't beyond the Alps in Germany. Much good he'd do us! We'd earn a title, and the privilege of riding at his tail. And Fra Pietro says he must soon go on the crusade, in which case he'd require one of us to attend him, with our best—"

"The —— take Fra Pietro and the Pope along with him," snorted Old Nicolo.

The friar lifted hands in horror. Black Guido looked solemnly angry.

"That trenches on blasphemy," he said slowly.

Old Nicolo's little pig-eyes sparked fire; he raised his hands in mimicry of Fra Pietro and burlesqued Guido's tone.

"Our Guido fears blasphemy! Did you hear him, Nicolo?"

"I heard," Young Nicolo assented. "We are far apart, we three."

Ciutazzo, from his corner, marked the sinister note that underlay this interchange. He stiffened at the abrupt finality of Old Nicolo's manner.

"Guido, you are no man to turn religious. No, no, be quiet while I speak! Not the Pope himself, if he labored day and night for a month, could absolve you of your sins. Therein you are my son, and I am proud of you within reason. But do not make the mistake of thinking that because I am old and fat I must step aside and let you or your brother manage the affairs of the Gritti."

His chest boomed as he thumped it.

"*I* am the Gritti! It is I who decide policies. You—" he leveled that stumpy forefinger of his again, this time at Fra Pietro—"you, friar, I have suffered you to hear this discussion because there is no harm that you or any other can wreak upon me while I sit here in Castello Gritti, with the Luck over my head. Go from here, and tell all—all, I say! Tell the Pope I despise him. Tell the emperor he is a time-waster, afraid of strong measures. Tell the Venetians I work with them so long as it suits my purpose. Tell any man anything. You can not harm Nicolo degli Gritti. And when I

can not manage my own sons—ah, why, then, he can have this castle who will take it."

He sank back in his chair, and Guido leaned across the table toward him, beard bristling, cheeks ensanguined, fingers opening and shutting—as if they reached for a dagger, Ciutazzo thought.

"By the ——, you stretch my patience, Old One! What? You sit here, at your ease, toying with that red-haired slut the signoria set to spy on us, and we—we—my brother and I—we must take the toll that keeps our company together. We must take the risk of the road, venture the galleys of Venice, the Saracens, the emperor—for you! For your lousy profit! Ho, Young One—"

But Young Nicolo shook his head gently, a mild gleam of amusement in his yellow eyes.

"This is your quarrel, Guido," he said. "It is on your head. We work better alone. A man must trust another to—"

Guido cursed him with an awful malice and earnestness that chased cold shivers up and down Ciutazzo's spine. But the jester forgot this as he noticed the friar's face. Fra Pietro had ceased acting a part; he was watching the Gritti with the level interest of one who gauges a quarrel which may conceivably work to his personal profit. Calm, a hint of disdain in the curve of his lips, he sat entirely aloof from the hateful atmosphere of his surroundings. It was he who finally curbed Guido's rage.

"Curses are ill weapons, Lord Guido," he remonstrated sternly.

Guido lapsed into silence.

"At least there are others," he sputtered sullenly.

Ciutazzo, inching forward, saw the red glare Old Nicolo bent upon his son. And the jester was as nonplussed as the rest when the chief of the Gritti burst into raucous laughter.

"We are a rough brood, eh, friar?" he cried. "Minions of hell, you say. No doubt, no doubt! I say with pride I have shown mercy to none who could not enforce me to. But our tempers are stretched tonight, overstretched. Our throats are dry. It is poor quarreling, with a dry throat."

He clapped his hands, and the hangings of the door behind him were pushed aside to make way for Madonna Lisa.

"You called me, lord?" she asked.

"No, no, the servants, Madonna. We—"

"I sent them forth," she answered humbly. "They—voices were raised—I—"

She glanced apologetically from under her long lashes. Old Nicolo patted her shoulder approvingly.

"The servants in Castello Gritti are used to high words at the high table, Madonna. But you shall serve us. Bid them fetch us wine—some of that Apulian vintage the Young One found in the Sicilian dromond. It is fiery enough to burn out our tempers."

She laughed softly, understandingly, and glided back through the hangings.

"Strange," commented Young Nicolo. "I do not find myself thirsty."

"My throat is a furnace," snarled Guido. "If I ordered the castle we should not have to send for wine."

"All in time, my Guido," rebuked his father. "You would not have the holy friar think you wished to hasten me to my grave?"

Old Nicolo's grating laughter brought the cold shivers again to Ciutazzo's spine.

"The devil comes for his own at last," grunted Guido.

But Fra Pietro intervened before the quarrel could be resumed.

"If wine quiets tempers, let us apply wine, signori," he said in his deep, resonant voice. "But in truth here is no reason for temper. Three several courses, it appears, are open to you, and of you one is sponsor for each. I, it is true, am prejudiced a certain way, yet am I able to perceive the reason which abides in other men's prejudices, and if you will suffer me to speak of the position of the Holy Father I am certain you will put your minds upon the problem with a clarity conformable to wisdom."

"You know not the Gritti," Young Nicolo murmured lazily. "But continue, friar. You make me think of waves thundering on the rocks, which are unfretted by all the pounding and wetting."

"Give the waves time," returned Fra Pietro. "There is no rock they will not annihilate."

"Ah, but I am not interested in time," objected Young Nicolo. "My little day suffices me."

"Let the friar talk," rasped Guido.

"Yes, yes, let him talk," agreed Old Nicolo, peering over his shoulder at the door through which Madonna Lisa had vanished.

It seemed to Ciutazzo that there was a hint of eagerness in his bearing.

VII

"SO KINGS and emperors are but mortal," Fra Pietro was saying, "whatever be their pretense to majesty; but Holy Church is immortal. Pope follows Pope. Christ reigns eternal. And what are men-at-arms and crossbowmen compared with the winged words of innumerable preachers? Both forces the Holy Father controls. Force of flesh and force of spirit. Who can resist him—"

"Ha, the wine!" exclaimed Guido. "Your pardon, Fra Pietro, but this talking makes dry work. We shall all be the better for a sup of the Apulian."

The friar's brow had darkened at the interruption, but he made no comment, leaning back in his seat with his hands folded squarely on the table in front of him. The Gritti all leaned forward, hands outstretched for the goblets Madonna Lisa offered them—booty of raid and piracy, poised on a tray of handbeaten silver from Morocco. She stopped first by Guido, tendering him a golden chalice that once had held the sacramental wine in a Syrian cathedral.

"You were thirstiest, Lord Guido," she said prettily.

He accepted it with a grunt of thanks, and buried his mustache in the ruddy liquor it contained. Ciutazzo, bright-eyed in his corner, marked Old Nicolo incline farther forward and, simultaneously, Fra Pietro wave away the companion to Guido's chalice.

"You show no respect for my cloth, woman!" the friar growled angrily. "That vessel was consecrated to the Blood of our Saviour."

"Surely, then, it will not harm you to drink from it," she answered, smiling. And Old Nicolo snarled—

"Take what is given you, shaveling."

"I fear you are abandoned to primitive superstitions, good friar," jeered Young Nicolo, his yellow eyes afire with derision.

But Fra Pietro pushed the chalice from him, doggedly persistent.

"I have broken bread with you," he said, "and I will drink with you, albeit from another—"

He extended his hand toward a slim goblet of hammered silver, but Madonna Lisa retired hastily.

"No, no," she stammered. "The chalice—"

And she looked uneasily at Old Nicolo. Ciutazzo hugged himself the closer, matching the feral gleam in the Old One's little eyes with the sudden tenseness in Young Nicolo's still face. The jester was not surprized as Guido hurled his chalice from him, features drawn and anguished, hands plucking at the air.

"Poison," groaned Guido. "Poison, friar! The red-haired devil! Ho, strumpet—"

She had watched him, fascinated, from behind Fra Pietro's chair, and now, with a clumsy readiness, he kicked his own chair back and stumbled toward her. She squealed and dropped her tray, so that the wine splashed on the friar's brown robe and the lovely goblets rolled upon the floor.

"Not I, Lord Guido," she clamored. "He told me—I was bid—"

She turned to flee, her foot slipped in a puddle of wine and Guido clamped one hand upon her shoulder; his dagger flashed from his belt—down, swift as summer lightning. The hilt clicked

smartly on her collarbone. She screamed—

"Jesus!"

Ciutazzo, on his knees, clinging to a fold of tapestry, saw her swing limp from Guido's arm, then tumble in a heap of sodden finery. And Guido, the dagger dripping in his hand, caught at the friar's chair, steadied himself and reeled round the table's end.

"You, Old One!" he gasped. "Your doing. A thousand pains gnaw me. God curse you! You wrought—"

Old Nicolo gained his feet, with the extraordinary agility of which his huge body was capable.

"Yes, I bade her do it," he said scornfully. "So perishes any son of mine who thinks to supplant me. I lead the Gritti, boy! You are food for worms as you stand."

And lightly as Ciutazzo, he leaped on to his chair and snatched the sword Gray Maiden from its place above the mantel.

"While I have strength to swing the Gritti Luck, I am the Gritti," he boasted.

The sword circled his head, lambent, alive, terrible in its menace, hissing faintly as it split the air.

"For so long, Old One," agreed Young Nicolo, lounging comfortably as if nothing had happened. "But I am not so stupid as Guido."

Fra Pietro started up, aghast, but unafraid.

"This is mortal sin you do," he cried. "Lord Guido, I command you—"

"God's Wounds, friar, let the boy die as he pleases!" roared Old Nicolo. "I'll give you my blessing later."

He jumped from the chair, and waddled to meet his son; and Guido, mastering the agony of the poison, staggered erect and reeled on.

"Too bad," Old Nicolo deplored. "This needn't have happened for years, lad. But I couldn't let you flout me to my face. It's true what the Young One says. He's not so stupid as you, and if he—"

"May every torment of hell be yours," sobbed Guido. "If my mother—"

He lurched, and falling, lunged forward with his dagger. Old Nicolo stepped to one side and ran him through, taking an obvious satisfaction in the precision of the thrust.

"His mother," reflected the chief of the Gritti. "Humph! She it was who would have run off with the Frenchman from Naxos—the year after you were born, Young One. I remember! We—ah—entertained her very passably. I had a Greek in the kitchen, then, who made a delectable dish of sheeps' hearts. She was very—"

"Give heed to the friar," Young Nicolo advised him.

Old Nicolo smiled at the fury of detestation in Fra Pietro's face. And again Ciutazzo, huddled in his corner, sensed one of those tempestuous outbursts of psychic energy which are loosed by strong characters in moments of deep feeling.

"Ha, brown brother," thought the jester, "are you one will face the devil in his lair?"

"You must acquit me of any desire to be unpleasant, shaveling," remarked Old Nicolo pleasantly enough. "But you *would* try to create trouble in Castello Gritti. So it must be a lesson to you. Sad, eh? Two folks slain, and your fault—or shall we lay the blame to the Holy Father? Personally, I don't believe in chucking responsibility, but—"

"You are possessed by the Evil One!" the friar exclaimed hoarsely. "Satan leers through your eyes. Yes, there is a devil in you! Behind me! Behind me, I say! Get thee behind me, Satan!"

He flourished his crucifix, and Old Nicolo nodded cynically.

"You would say that, friar. A man always seeks refuge in superstition when he encounters an evil stronger than his own. Now, I am generous and broad-minded. I recognize my own evil—and yours, too. You came here to trick me into your master's course, and you did not scruple to endeavor to set my son against me. But you are startled because I slew that disobedient son—yes, that

traitorous son. I believe I have grounds for my action in Holy Writ, but once more, I am not disposed to share the responsibility. I did it because I deemed it to my own interest to make away with a son who would have fought with his brother, if not with me. Now—"

"Now," drawled Young Nicolo, "you and I may poison and wrangle undisturbed. Well, we are better matched, Old One."

"Better," admitted his father. "You see how it is, friar? You tried and failed. And having plotted murder, you must bear punishment."

Fra Pietro did not quail.

"Perhaps it is I who shall punish," he answered. "But it is fruitless to talk of punishing such as you in this world. Only the hell your son wished you can avail."

Old Nicolo's pig-eyes twinkled amusedly.

"Ah, yes, I have heard much of that hell! I assure you, if there is such a place Guido is tapping on the door. And I regret to seem to hurry you, but I must send you the same road. So if you have any prayers—"

Fra Pietro regarded him steadily, then looked down at the pitiful heap that had been Madonna Lisa, and from that to the inert clay of Black Guido, whence trickled a dark red stream to mingle with the stains of poisoned wine and trollop's gore.

Ciutazzo chuckled noiselessly, clasping his knees. A man, this friar! *Per Baccho*, what a scene! Fat Old Nicolo, Gray Maiden's slim shape pendent from his hand, and across the table the squat, heavy-set figure of Fra Pietro, with only a crucifix for weapon. And Young Nicolo, lolling back and enjoying it all.

The hall a maze of flickering, prancing shadows, tapestries half-revealed by a stray spear of light, columns stretching away in dim perspective, the dais a blaze of lamps, with furniture overturned, cups and flagons strewn in the mess of the floor.

Fra Pietro moved; his fingers fumbled at the cord around his waist. Old Nicolo nodded approvingly.

"That's right. Get ready. Say your prayers, Friar."

"*Per Baccho*," cried Ciutazzo, and Young Nicolo half rose.

So swiftly that none of the three who watched comprehended his intent, Fra Pietro ripped off his brown robe and cast it like a net over Old Nicolo's head and shoulders. The coarse cloth draped down about the fat man's sword-arm, binding and hampering him. He could not see; he could only wave his sword and yammer curses. And while he struggled, the friar vaulted the table and tripped him.

Young Nicolo was on his feet at last, yellow eyes expanded, a tinge of color in his olive cheeks; but Ciutazzo saw that he moved deliberately, in no apparent haste.

"What are you doing, friar?" he inquired coolly.

Panting and wrestling, fighting for a grip on Old Nicolo's sword-arm, Fra Pietro ignored the question, until he had contrived to loop his waist-cord around his enemy's throat. Then he gave a great tug, and as Old Nicolo gagged he turned a flushed face and answered—

"It is forbidden us to draw blood; therefore I strangle the wretch."

"So? You strangle the—wretch," Young Nicolo repeated. "But he is my father, good friar."

"He is Satan," retorted Fra Pietro, and tugged the harder.

Then a single whistling cry escaped his victim; the huge body leaped in a convulsive spasm and lay still.

Fra Pietro detached the fingers that clasped the sword, and stood up in his shirt, sweat beading his forehead and thick neck, blood oozing from a small cut in one of his hairy, brown legs.

"It is not fitting that I should be an executioner," he said composedly, "but the man was a murderer, and moreover, would have slain me. I will make due report to my superiors."

"Indeed?" asked Young Nicolo. "You will have much to tell your superiors."

The friar gave him a keen look.

"That is so, lord."

Young Nicolo's eyes expanded and contracted, staring unwinkingly the while.

"That sword you have is the symbol of my family's power," he remarked curtly. "Hand it to me."

But Fra Pietro shook his head.

"This is a den of sin," declared the friar. "Perhaps I shall require a weapon."

A deadly note rang in Young Nicolo's voice.

"I ask the last time," he threatened. "That sword is the Gritti Luck."

Fra Pietro laughed contemptuously.

"The Gritti Luck? When it suffered your father to be slain by an unarmed man? You speak of a foolish and godless superstition. No, no, Lord Nicolo, I will take the sword and presently throw it in the sea. And do you lead a decent life hereafter or the Holy Father will—"

Young Nicolo's dagger glinted from his sheath; his right arm crooked forward. Fra Pietro ducked and retreated; Nicolo pursued, cheeks pinched and chalky lips bubbling curses. Slow-moving, the friar, yet firm on his feet and vigilant, wielding the sword with a strength that atoned for his awkardness—an odd figure in flapping shirt-tails, contrasting weirdly with Nicolo's supple, coiling form in green velvet that shone golden under the lamps.

Nicolo pressed the fight. He cared little that the friar had a sword while he had but a dagger. The friar was a friar. He was Nicolo degli Gritti. So round and round they stamped, feinting, foining, blades rattling, breath hissing, tripping on the corpses, slipping in the runlets of blood, eyes intent on each other, heedless of Ciutazzo flattening himself against the hangings. *Per Baccho*, what a night! One, two, three dead folk, and—

Young Nicolo snatched one of the chalices from the floor and flung it in Fra Pietro's face. The friar stumbled blindly, and Nicolo closed, hacking and stabbing in a frenzy of hatred; but Gray Maiden flashed up like a living thing, a dazzling, shifting web of steel, and Nicolo yielded ground, panting from his efforts.

Fra Pietro, too, retired a pace, unhurried, cautious. And the pair stood motionless in the glow of the lamps—stood motionless so long that Ciutazzo blinked his eyes in the strain of watching them. And as he blinked, Nicolo leaped to the attack, a very tiger's leap, sure and ferocious, the dagger hooked like a great claw to disembowel the friar. Ah, but the friar had not blinked! Gray Maiden whistled ominously, a flat arc of cold light—and Nicolo collapsed in midair. He lay outstretched as he had leaped, his feet by his dead father, one balled fist touching the clay of the brother he had hated.

"So pass the Gritti," Ciutazzo exclaimed aloud.

The friar peered stupidly at the jester's motley, then down at Nicolo's headless body and the red-gemmed blade of the sword that winked at the two living men with a kind of savage mirth—almost as if it knew what had been wrought with its aid, Ciutazzo thought.

"This is mortal sin," said Fra Pietro. "I have shed a man's blood. I must have absolution."

"If you will," assented the jester amicably. "And I will have the sword."

"You, jester? Nonsense! What will you do with a sword?"

"Use it, at need," returned Ciutazzo. "The castle must have a master."

"A jester rule in Castello Gritti?" Fra Pietro frowned suspiciously. "Who are you?"

"I am called Ciutazzo," the jester answered directly.

"Whose man are you?" persisted the friar.

"This night? *Per Baccho*, my own!"

Ciutazzo took a step toward the other, lithely, easily. Fra Pietro presented the sword.

"No, no, stand fast. I suspect you, Dogface. And I have won this castle for the Holy Father."

Ciutazzo seemed to consider this, sliding one foot forward, turning sidewise, a hand resting upon the chair in which Old Nicolo had sat.

"For the Holy Father, eh? Why, that

is to be seen, brown brother. Suppose, now—"

He paused, aggravatingly, and rubbed his chin. Fra Pietro eyed him askance.

"Suppose what?" snapped the friar. "If you think to stir up the castle folk against me I will have you banned—yes, and imprisoned. Be off, and summon men to clean up this shambles."

"Bide, bide," protested Ciutazzo. "Here is much to be decided. Suppose, as I was about to say, we declared for the emperor?"

"You talk like the simpleton I suspect you are," Fra Pietro retorted. "We have no traffic with the emperor. Through God's will the Gritti have met the deaths their sins merited. And I should be worthless in God's sight if I did not seize this opportunity to enrich the Church's earthly kingdom."

"But you see, I am for the emperor," the jester remonstrated gently.

"For the emperor? You?" the friar laughed shortly. "Ah, but why not? He prefers the company of jesters and tumblers to that of learned men. You are a pert fellow. I shall imprison you, lest you carry information to whoever sent you."

"If you work for your side, I work for mine," reasoned Ciutazzo. "That is fair, and whichever wins—"

"There is no such thing as fairness in this matter," rebuked Fra Pietro. "Here is only right and wrong. I am right; you are wrong. So you must give way."

"Ah, but what is right?" argued Ciutazzo.

Fra Pietro made an impatient gesture.

"You are a pestilent animal, Dogface. Go and call the servants."

"Well, if there is no right in this, there may be might," said the jester.

He picked up Old Nicolo's chair as casually as if it had been a footstool and, with no more warning than Fra Pietro had given Old Nicolo in casting his robe, he threw it half the width of the dais. *Crash!* The friar was swept over the edge, his head snapping back with a hollow crack against the stone step. The chair shattered to pieces and the sword Gray Maiden leaped free of Fra Pietro's lifeless grasp, soared up to the roof and clattered down on the table within arm's reach of Ciutazzo.

The jester lifted the long, slim blade, fitting his hand lovingly to the plain, fluted steel grip of the cross-hilt, balancing the weight upon his wrist.

"Ah, you beauty," he murmured. "What other sweetheart would a man have than you! *Per Baccho*, you have slashed many a road to fortune, I'll wager! Why not mine? Birth—what is that? Name—what is that? I have a sword—and a castle for the taking. Many *condottiere* has started with less."

Feet shuffled down the hall's shadowy aisles; he had a glimpse of pale faces, hovering, prying; a whisper echoed in the silence.

"Ho," he cried, "enter, my people! You have had a change of masters. See, the Gritti are dead! Madonna Lisa, too. And this friar. Now Ciutazzo rules in Castello Gritti."

They poured up the hall, men of the garrison in the lead, under-officers, crossbowmen, men-at-arms, a scattering of upper servants.

"Who has done this, Dog-face?" quavered old Gianni, who had been with the Gritti, men said, since the Luck came into the family.

Ciutazzo waved an airy hand about him.

"You see the dead, Gianni. You see me. And you see in my hand—"

"The Luck," rose a whispered chorus.

"He has the Luck! The jester has slain them all."

"——! Was ever the like?"

"Dogface has the Luck."

"Lord Dogface, if it please you," Ciutazzo corrected them merrily.

"But you are a jester, Dogface—I mean lord—I mean—" Gianni floundered desperately. "You— Perhaps we should slay him," he appealed to the others.

Ciutazzo raised Gray Maiden significantly, and the mob of retainers swayed away from him.

"I am come from the emperor," he announced. "I hold Castello Gritti for him, as his man. And you owe me allegiance because I have won the Luck."

"Yes, yes," men muttered. "He has won the Luck."

"But a jester to be our lord!" objected others.

"He is no ordinary jester. Blessed Virgin, look to the killing he has done! The Gritti—and the friar—and Madonna Lisa. A hard man!"

"Were—were you a spy for the emperor—Lord Ciutazzo?" Gianni inquired hesitantly.

"Yes, you might call me that," Ciutazzo acknowledged. "But we have talked enough. I am lord here. Let that suffice."

"And what will it please you to have us call you?" pressed Gianni.

"Lord Ciutazzo," the jester answered promptly. "It is a good name. I am satisfied with it. And look you, Gianni, I will have the armorers change the crests on the men's shields. It is to be a dog's head. Let the banners be altered likewise."

"If it pleases you, Lord," bowed Gianni. "But—but—will you be Ciutazzo degli Gritti?"

Ciutazzo rubbed his chin, as was his habit when thinking.

"No," he decided. "I want no more to do with the Gritti. I shall be—humph!—call me Ciutazzo dalle Buonfortuno. A good name. It means something."

He glanced down at the proud, sinister features of Young Nicolo, whose head had rolled toward the dais edge.

"Who dies last?" he murmured, chuckling faintly. "Eh, Gray Maiden, who dies last? That is the question, *per Bacchol*"

The castle folk receded from the hall, muttering and crossing themselves.

"He talks to the dead," they whispered. "Yes, and to the sword."

"Was there ever the like? A jester to be lord!"

"But no ordinary jester."

"And he has the Luck."

"The Gritti Luck!"

"Ah, but it was no luck for them."

"There is magic in this."

"Yes, yes, black magic."

But old Gianni wagged his head disapprovingly, safe in the outer corridor.

"A man does not use magic to break people's heads and stab them," he declared bluntly. "Ciutazzo—" he bowed hastily in the direction of the hall—"Lord Ciutazzo is a great man in disguise. Perhaps one of the emperor's knights. We must serve him well. Now, if it had not been for me, some of you foolish fellows would have gone in there, and said more than you should—and whisk—"

A woman whispered from the hall door.

"He stays there—with *them*—the Lord Jester. He sits on the table. His chin is in his hand. He is looking at them. He speaks. See, his lips move."

She fled, and all the folk with her.

On the dais Ciutazzo continued to sit, alone with the slain. The fire had burned out of him, and the exaltation.

"I shall always wear motley," he was thinking. "Life is a jest. To succeed one must be a jester. Eh, Gray Maiden? You should know, who have pointed so many jests. Ha, lass, we'll jest together! Let the humor out of men's bodies! What say you, Fra Pietro? And you, Madonna Lisa, who were so fair? And the Gritti, so strong, so treacherous, so cruel, so certain? What did you have of your religion and your lusts and your power and your cunning? A jest, only a jest! A breath of life—and death. That I might profit from you! The sword was mightier than all of you, mightier than I, who live longest. So walk warily, Dogface, be humble! Some day the jest must be on you."

If the Cable Break

BY

KINGSLEY MOSES

THAT the profession of the cable engineer—who is responsible for the laying and maintaining of the deep-sea cables which unite the continents—is not overcrowded in not to be wondered at when one considers the scientific knowledge, expert seamanship and personal stamina and courage necessary for the task.

Coiled in the circular tanks of a specially constructed vessel, the total length of a transatlantic cable will weigh between six and seven thousand tons; a copper-cored, iron-bound snake of a thing about twice as large as the ordinary garden hose in circumference and some three thousand miles long. To lay this smoothly and evenly along the bottom of the ocean from America to England is no simple task.

Last year, when the latest transatlantic cable was laid from Rockaway Beach, the cable-ship *Colonia* steamed in as close as possible to the breakers and sent the shore end of the cable to land, buoyed up on barrels and ultimately dragged in by a motor truck with a winch. Then slowly the ship got under weigh, headed due east for the Azores.

Out from its deep tank, soaked and slimy, the cable began slowly to uncoil. In those tanks, which are kept always wet to keep down the temperature, the cable has originally been coiled flake upon flake with the greatest care, in order that no possible snarl or kink may cause a rupture of the endless rope and imperil the lives of many men. The cable runs out from the tank over greased rollers, around a giant brake, or drum, and thence is dropped over sheaves into the sea, the strain on the cable being constantly from four to five tons. And this strain is unremitting day and night for perhaps two whole weeks at a time. Unsuspected depths in submarine valleys forever invisible to the eye of man, strange swift running deep-sea currents may at any moment cause this strain to increase instantly, drawing the dragging cable taut and causing it to hum and vibrate threateningly.

Here is a situation where expert handling is necessary, and unflinching courage as well. Perhaps you have seen a boat's hawser snap, smashing everything within its arc in its ferocity of recoil. Imagine then the damage that may be effected by the snapping of a solid metal cable drawn tight for perhaps fifteen miles of its length!

Nor can the condition be immediately relieved by slacking off. To back up on the cable means almost surely that somewhere deep down there in the darkness the bight will kink up and break itself. Then all the work will have to be done over—a matter of a million dollars maybe. No, the cable-ship, whatever the tension upon the line, must always go ahead, slowly but steadily. And, while death threatens at every instant, every man of the fifteen or twenty along the length of the cable from forward tank to taffrail sheave must stand to his post.

If the cable break—as sometimes it must—flag-draped coffins will slip down into the deep, while the survivors of the crew stand silent.

But no sooner is the funeral finished than the ship must put about, grapnels swinging to pick up the lost line from the slime of the ocean's bed. Somehow, some time those trailing hooks must catch on the lost line of the cable, drag it up to the surface and aboard ship. There it will be quickly spliced on to the coils still aboard; and once more the laying will continue, so that communication between the two worlds may be secure and uninterrupted.

Concluding Wastrel

DAN McGUIRE had been hiding, wounded and alone, in a pile of copra for more than a day when young David Brade came in with his trading-ship and took Dan back to Kialo to his father's plantation. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Brade there were on the plantation Brade's partner, Fanning, and his wife who had left her real husband in the States.

The richest estate on Kialo was that of Symonds, a gentleman planter, who left all his affairs in the hands of his brutal overseer, Zurdas, who had such a hold over Symonds that he was able to force a marriage between Reena, Symonds' beautiful daughter, and his own half-witted son, Manuel. Reena tried to escape the night after the marriage and McGuire tried to help her, but Zurdas caught him.

To gain time McGuire told Symonds and the bully a mixture of truth and lies: That he and Reena knew that she was not really Symonds' daughter, but the child of a man whom Zurdas had killed so that Symonds might have his wife—which was truth; that a strange man whom McGuire had found on the island was Reena's father, not really killed and now come for vengeance—which was a lie. While the questioning was going on Reena escaped alone and Zurdas set out in search, leaving McGuire in the hands of Symonds. But the gentleman planter, not daring to face disgrace, shot himself, and McGuire escaped.

The next morning McGuire went back to Brade's plantation to find that Reena had taken refuge there and that young

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A New Novel by GORDON YOUNG
With Dan McGuire *in the South Seas*

David Brade, who had formerly thought her insane, now believed her story and seemed to love her. The Brades refused to give her up at Zurdas's threats, and in the discussion the shameful secret of his dealings with the natives came out.

When Reena and McGuire were alone together the girl told Dan, much to his astonishment, that it was him she loved, not David; and McGuire, the wastrel beachcomber, suddenly realized that he loved her. When he declared that it was impossible for such a worthless vagabond as himself to be more than a friend to her—she kissed him. They turned to see David Brade standing behind them, but he made no comment on the scene he had stumbled upon. McGuire could only hope that his friend did not think he had deliberately betrayed him.

Cullum, the magistrate, and the consuls, Morris and Lamont, decided to hold inquiry about the death of Symonds, for Zurdas had accused McGuire of murdering the man. When, in the presence of the magistrate, McGuire was making Manuel, who hated him, tell his story, a shotgun roared from the darkness of the garden and Manuel, dying, a hole torn in his back, gasped lies that threw suspicion on the beachcomber. McGuire caught Pealo, the murderer, in the garden.

"You blasted idiot!" he raged. "You—you won't need to say I put you up to it. They'll think it soon enough. Why didn't you put it to your own head and pull the trigger with your big toe?"

IV

PEALO, with McGuire's hand at the back of his neck, stood above Manuel's body. Pealo was confused, frightened but unrepentant. To be revenged on Zurdas he had killed what Zurdas loved, or so Pealo had thought as he waited long hours.

The shotgun had been picked up where Pealo had dropped it in the first jump of flight. Mr. Morris, having taken the gun from Lamont, turned it about with morbid scrutiny under the light as if he had never before seen a shotgun.

Magistrate Cullum, with deep-voiced, solemn anger and ferocious stare at Pealo, thundered—

"You might have killed one of us, one of us!"

Cullum's excitement, almost anxiety, gave his big bull-like face so strained an expression that his familiar features seemed unfamiliar. Never had he been so shaken. His paunch still shook with jelly-like trembling from his short rapid breathing.

Mrs. Morris gasped in moans, as if a son of her own lay dead at her feet, and with palms to eyes she tried to shut out what she had seen. The gun's roar and blast of light had seemed to be almost in her face.

The sound of the gun and outcries had brought servants. With impudent curiosity they came near, gaping with heads bent; and when ordered back, even pushed by Cullum, they moved reluctantly and waited near-by.

Pealo, standing with body lob-sided, looked about with a kind of furtive curiosity. He was frightened by the anger of the white men and threw uneasy glances toward the gun in Mr. Morris' hands, as if fearful that Mr. Morris might suddenly shoot.

"Better tie zat fellow," said Lamont, almost carelessly, pointing toward Pealo. "He be over ze railing and into ze dark again. Not zat he go far, but—eh? Tie him?"

At a word from Mr. Morris, one of the blacks seized Pealo and held on tightly

while another fetched cord; then, with seeming pleasure at being about something important, they tied Pealo's hands behind him.

"Gentleman," said Lamont, who for all of his French excitability was a very cool fellow, "should we not send for ze father?"

"Yes, Lamont," Mr. Morris replied. "Yes, yes. By all means. You—" he spoke to one of the servants—"run down to the club. Ask some one there to go at once for Zurdas. Say his son, his son, has been killed."

The native hurried off.

For a time no one spoke; each was heavy with thought. Then Magistrate Cullum, rubbing at his forehead with a wadded handkerchief, said with a kind of solemn helplessness—

"But what, what is to be done for the present with these two murderers?"

"Two?" Lamont inquired. Then he said, "Oh," understandingly.

McGuire regarded the magistrate steadily from under lowered lids.

"Two!" Cullum repeated firmly, fixing a stern look upon McGuire.

Lamont shrugged his shoulders. Diplomacy, on even such a fly-speck of an island as Kialo, was too delicate a game for Lamont to weaken his influence and friendliness by opposing these stronger officials in a matter that had nothing to do with French affairs.

"A matter for ze Breetish admiralty court at Seedney, eh?" Lamont inquired, thus with extreme delicacy reminding Cullum that the power of life and death was not in the keeping of Kialo's magistrate.

"Grave matter indeed," said Cullum. "Manuel's dying words—they will bear weight."

"He lied," said McGuire. "You know it was like him to lie."

"Have you, sir," said Cullum, with swelling indignation, "no respect for the dead?"

"Dead?" McGuire asked, and added recklessly, "You respect Judas Iscariot?"

"Blasphemy!" Cullum thundered and seemed to tremble with rage.

Lamont's lips twitched slightly. He glanced to right and left. Lamont was a cynical fellow who thought Cullum's piety was so much twaddle, but could not afford to let his thoughts be known. He noted that Mr. Morris had an expression of puzzled indignation, as if he felt he ought to be indignant but hardly knew just why. Lamont asked himself then the question he had asked of himself many times; it was an honest question and puzzled him—

"Why is it that the English, when they are such fools, rule the world? Fools they are, in religion, toward their women, in their prattling about careful justice; but rule they do."

Lamont shook his head sadly. Cullum noticed, and thought him deeply moved by the tragedy.

The men were alone on the veranda. Mrs. Morris, overcome with emotion, had gone within the house.

Hand behind him on the railing, McGuire stood ready to vault and vanish if there was more talk of tying him up, as he intended soon to jump anyhow and disappear into the shadows. His mind was made up: He would dodge away, get on the pearler, go out on her at dawn and so leave Kialo.

"I understand," said Cullum accusingly, "from talk I heard this afternoon that you, McGuire, gave him the money to purchase the weapon."

"And you heard me warn you to warn Zurdas."

"Ah, Zurdas, yes," said Cullum. "But Manuel was killed. And the very instant that he was accusing you of—"

"Well ask him then," said McGuire, flinging an indifferent gesture at Pealo.

"In due time, McGuire. In due time. He would not be likely here in your presence to admit that he had been posted there to overhear and—and the evidence speaks for itself, sir. Besides, we know you gave him the money to purchase the gun."

"In a store that openly sells firearms to natives under the nose of the magistrate and also the nose of our consuls. I'm

not defending this crippled —— here. But the reason Pealo killed him is because you, you men, all you, have not defended him from the abuse of whites like Zurdas."

The cynical Lamont looked at the ash-tipped end of his cigaret; his eyebrows lifted quizzically as if about some doubtful rite of augury. Then he darted a faintly amused glance at Mr. Morris, who regarded McGuire with a kind of sorrowful amazement while the outraged magistrate, thus addressed by a rascal, a suspected murderer, glared ponderously. Lamont shrugged his shoulders. He rather liked McGuire now, believed in him, but could do nothing more than keep quiet though he half-guessed McGuire meant to jump and run.

"One thing more," said McGuire. "Reena will tell—"

At that moment there was the clatter of a horse on the graveled road, and the horse stopped before the house.

"There — she's come! Now you'll hear—"

McGuire broke off and ran along the veranda. He paused, peering, listening as he heard heavy feet coming rapidly up the steps.

"Reena? Is Reena with you?" McGuire called. There was no answer. He saw a figure dimly appear, and he said, "Where's Reena?"

Zurdas, close before him, answered with an oath, and the next instant the strong hand of Zurdas closed on McGuire's shoulder, jerked him sidewise and slammed him up against the wall.

Lamont was near-by, behind him Mr. Morris, then Cullum came with short steps and heavy stride.

Zurdas spoke through clenched teeth—

"You killed my boy!"

In the dim light that reached to where they stood, McGuire saw that Zurdas wore a flap holster on the front of his belt and held a hand there; and McGuire, watchfully alert for what Zurdas in sudden madness might do, braced himself to try to twist about and dodge away from under the heavy grip on his shoulder. Zurdas was powerful, McGuire light of weight, and the fingers were set on his shoulder like claws.

Abruptly, Zurdas lifted his free hand and pushed up the brim of his hat, flattening it against the crown; then he gestured with clenched fist near McGuire's head and said—

"Word came you killed my boy!"

Lamont spoke readily:

"Not he, Zurdas. Pealo did eet, over there, with a shotgun in ze back!"

"And I was seated in front of him, squarely in front of him," said Cullum, breathing heavily. "Frightful thing! Frightful!"

"But you—" Zurdas drew McGuire from the wall, then slammed him against it— "you put that nigger up to it!"

McGuire did not reply. He knew that anything he said would be futile. As well as he could in the dim light he watched Zurdas' face, trying to catch what warning he could of what might come. Then, without a word, Zurdas jerked him again from the wall and pushed him forward along the veranda.

The other men, in an anxious procession, followed, with Cullum now leading. Lamont said into Morris' ear—

"Zurdas make me have ze—how you call 'em?—creeps."

"I am sorry for him, Lamont. Profoundly sorry. Misfortune tramples upon him."

"Eh? I am more sorry for McGuire. Zurdas will give heem ——. You see what I tell you."

"No, no," said Mr. Morris hastily. "Zurdas will do nothing like that. McGuire will be placed in custody."

"Eh, so? In whose?" Lamont asked skeptically.

"It will be arranged, be arranged."

Zurdas, for a time in silence, stood above the body of his son and somberly stared at the black wound, now blood-tinted, and the grip of his hand on McGuire was convulsively tight.

Cullum, Lamont, Morris stood about with an air of awkward uneasiness, all a little anxious as to what Zurdas might next do, or try to do. Pealo had limped

backward, sidling off fearfully. But Zurdas, who had so often alarmed and assaulted men with blustering, savage temper, now seemed another sort of man; his dark massive face was set rigidly, and with morose brooding he gazed at the dead thing he had once loved and had this night forgiven.

Lamont, the more alert of those standing by, with a kind of furtive watchfulness noted the bulging knuckles of Zurdas' fist where it gripped McGuire's shoulder and saw the shadowy grimaces of pain come and go across McGuire's face. Mr. Morris, deeply affected by this tragedy, had his eyes closed; which, Lamont thought, was in a way characteristic, since he saw but little of what went on about him. Mr. Cullum gazed with a kind of solemn anxiety at Zurdas, his hand opening and closing on the wadded handkerchief with which from time to time he wiped his forehead.

Zurdas, with effort, as if he could not raise his voice much above a whisper, said:

"You will pay for this—*both* of you! I had just come to town to find my boy—and this—"

"He will pay," said Cullum in a slow, deep tone, and unfolding a dramatic gesture added, "Manuel's last words convict McGuire of murdering Mr. Symonds."

Cullum believed it. The tragic manner of his death had fixed upon Manuel's words the accent of truth. Mr. Morris nodded; he too felt McGuire was greatly guilty, and his present sympathy was wholly for the father who had come with forgiveness seeking the son he had the night before cast out. Lamont, being French, was emotional but not at all sentimental, and was not, as the others were, impressed by the glamour of pathos. He had always distrusted Zurdas and detested Manuel; also he had half-way liked McGuire and now believed him guiltless, but he saw no way of saying or doing anything to help him. So he uneasily lighted one cigaret from the tip of another and wondered what Zurdas meant to do.

Zurdas jerked McGuire about so that they were face to face; then Zurdas twisted down one side of his mouth, his black eyes became narrow and, lifting his free hand slowly, he held the hooked fingers almost against McGuire's throat and seemed about to close on the throat with sudden neck-breaking grip.

Lamont's hand flashed up, Mr. Morris raised both hands out, and Cullum, too, ponderously reached up. Their mouths were open to speak, but Zurdas, as if wrath made his voice husky, said:

"That is how—both of you! You and her together—you'll see. I'll do it, you ——!" Curses followed with rising tone.

Lamont eyed the other men to see whether they noticed the strangeness of this threat, but apparently they noticed only the immediate menace, for Cullum lifted his hand commandingly, saying:

"No violence! No violence!"

Mr. Morris hastily put his hands to Zurdas' arm, saying anxiously:

"No, Zurdas, no! Let justice take care of him."

Zurdas turned glaring eyes upon Mr. Morris and spoke contemptuously:

"Justice! U-ah, he'll get away."

"We will take every precaution," said Cullum.

"You have our profound sympathy, Zurdas," said Mr. Morris earnestly, "but the punishment of these two men must come in the form of justice."

Zurdas' answer was a kind of snarl; the word "justice" angered him; and he turned on McGuire as if about to crush him then and there, but Cullum and Morris spoke in urgent protest and together put their hands on Zurdas.

Then they heard men's voices and the scrape of hurrying feet. Seven or eight men came, breathless with haste. With them was the servant Mr. Morris had sent to the club to ask that some one ride to Zurdas; but Zurdas had, but a few minutes before the servant came, dismounted at the club, and getting the word he jumped to his horse and came at a gallop. The others had followed on foot.

Now they crowded about, gaped and asked questions. They looked at Pealo with staring curiosity, as if he were a strange savage from a far country instead of the familiar old cripple every one knew.

"Tie him!" said Zurdas; and men, picking up ends of the cord with which Pealo had been tied, bound McGuire's wrists with many turns. It was not until then that Zurdas took his hand from McGuire's shoulder and, turning him roughly about, examined the lashing on his wrists.

Among those who had just arrived were the Benz Brothers, storekeepers. They, one after the other, meddlesomely examined the cord on McGuire's wrists.

"Id iss nod strong urnough," said one. "I could preak id."

"All right, you do eet," said Lamont, offering an end that had been discarded.

The elder Bentz took the cord between his hands and jerked, again, again, again. He did not break it, but cast the cord aside and rubbed his hurt fingers.

McGuire, as unobservantly as he could, jerked and pulled, hopeful of stretching the cord or loosening the knot. His wrists were small, but his hands had been broadened by work at sea. Lamont saw what he was doing and in an undertone said:

"Stop eet! You try to get away, he keel you."

"Put a knife's blade to this, will you? I'll take the chance, now."

"I would like to do eet, but you have ze patience."

Some one, striding near, called loudly: "What's he saying, Lamont?" and without waiting for a reply asked, "What's to be done with him? To put these fellows in a native hut and set natives to watch 'em would be the same as turning 'em loose. Benz here offers his icehouse as a jail. That's solid and safe, don't you think?"

So the talk went on. Listening, McGuire burned his wrists with twisting and pulling against the cords. He meant, if he could wrench his hands free, to bolt headlong. But his wrists were firmly bound.

The talk of where he and Pealo should be imprisoned fell into agreement with the Benz suggestion of the icehouse; though Mr. Morris, a thoroughly just man, protested that it was small, without ventilation, and said the heat would be suffocating.

"Serve 'em right," said some one.

"No gettin' out, that's sure."

"A pad feller, MagGuire."

"We ought to give 'em justice!" said an eager voice.

"Let me hear no more suggestions like that, sir!" said Cullum firmly.

"They will be given over to the proper authorities," said Mr. Morris, quite sternly.

Wrangling, more petulant than serious, discussed Kialo's right as a free island to dispose of its own affairs; and some one appealed to Lamont to ask what he thought of the fact that the shadow of the British Admiralty lay over the whole of the South Seas.

Lamont shrugged his shoulders and, with a trace of cynical good-nature, said—

"If might eet is right, ze Breetish are ze chozen peaple of ze good God."

Mr. Morris, hearing that, let his face be slightly shadowed with disapproval. The remark had the suggestion of a joke in the presence of the dead; it seemed to hint enigmatically at blasphemy, too. Perhaps, most objectionably of all, it sounded like a subtle criticism of the British Empire.

"That," said Mr. Morris in kindly reproach, "is unworthy of you, Lamont."

Lamont readily apologized.

Then Mr. Morris with a tolerant, unargumentative manner, but quite firmly, discussed the care of these prisoners. He would not give his approval to their being put into this icehouse, as suitable as it was for a prison, because there was no means of ventilation.

Suggestions flew about, one of which was that a hole be chopped in the flat roof. The Benzes both at once, excitably, though the dungeon-like affair was useless

to them, said chopping would ruin the icehouse as an icehouse.

Zurdas, who had been silent, glowering-ingly silent, much as if resentful of the presence of these men, spoke:

"I'll pay for damage done. —— your chatter—all you, you loose-tongued women!"

He called them worse names than gabbling women, cursed brutally, and his black narrowed eyes gleamed with challenge. The palaver, the gaping meddlesomeness of their curiosity, the indirection and delay of justice offended him. Pointing down with straight-armed gesture as he looked into their abashed faces, he said:

"You let my boy lay there like a —— dog till you've stared your fill at him. Oh —— you, all of you, and this —— island!"

V

ALL LEFT Mr. Morris' veranda and set out for the Benz store, excepting Cullum, who waddled too much to walk in comfort and said he would remain there in case Reena came in or the man Harris who had gone for her returned. It was, he said, strange, strange indeed, that by this time she had not come or Harris at least, had not been heard from. In the excitement of marching off with McGuire and Pealo, no one paid much attention to Cullum's muttered rumbling and headshaking.

The Benzes went ahead as if showing the way. Pealo was yanked along, stumbling awkwardly in crippled haste. McGuire walked before Zurdas, who did not now lay hand on him but marched close behind like a warder. Lamont carried one of the lanterns and walked by Zurdas' side. He was downright apprehensive, for he saw the dogged menace in Zurdas' big body, and the forward droop of shoulders gave a kind of lurching stagger to his gait, as if he were about to pitch forward upon McGuire. Lamont in fact soon became so uneasy, was so sure that he sensed a murderous devil in Zurdas making ready for some outbreak, that he stepped rapidly to McGuire's side and took his arm.

In a moment McGuire, speaking plainly and letting who would overhear, said:

"Do me this favor, Lamont—or since you and all these fellows are so concerned with *justice*, there's no favor to what I ask! Reena should have been here by this time or long ago. And when she comes, get all these men together so they can hear her tell—"

There was a sudden rushing movement from behind. Lamont was knocked, staggering, aside. McGuire was caught by the throat, shaken, struck and cast violently to the ground. Zurdas cursed and clawed at the holster dangling at the front of his belt, but men crowded close about him with hurried protest. For the time Zurdas seemed beside himself with fury. McGuire, he said, was a liar; the girl—his was a brutal name for her—was a liar. Together, he said, they had planned lies.

"Bring her!" he cried. "Bring her if you can!" Then, as a kind of afterthought, he roared, "She is afraid to come—I know her tricks and his! That's how he killed Symonds—they planned it! And my boy—"

It was like Zurdas to get himself into a sudden fury; and to the men who heard him there seemed reason enough, but they protested clamorously. Mr. Morris, with distressed earnestness, said:

"I understand, Zurdas. We understand how you feel. But he is the Crown's prisoner—the Crown's prisoner, Zurdas."

Zurdas cursed the Crown and that word "justice" men threw at him.

As McGuire, with writhing twist of body was getting from knees to feet with the glow of Lamont's lantern on his face, Zurdas shouted down at him—

"Another word—another word out of you and I'll—I'll kill you now!"

McGuire at that moment, with hands bound behind him and one knee still on the ground, had much the posture of a slave under a whip as he faced Zurdas. He arose, and as he arose Lamont, fascinated by the look on McGuire's face,

lifted the lantern so that its glow was still upon him.

"Kill me?" said McGuire with insolence, even there under the black distorted scowl of Zurdas' face. "Not before witnesses you won't! You kill only as you killed the Preston woman, Tomas, Reena's fathe—"

At that the quick-witted Lamont pushed the lantern blindingly into Zurdas' face, and other men clutched at Zurdas' arm as the revolver was half drawn. They were shaken about, but scramblingly snatched at him and yelled imploringly. Staggering, trampling on one another's feet, swearing they struggled with Zurdas, and he answered with anger-drunken oaths that he would—by —— he would!—then and there kill McGuire.

Not all, in the excitement, had understood McGuire's words; others took no notice as they seemed merely the wild, baseless yelping of an angry guilty man. Only Lamont seemed to have heard.

"You," he said to McGuire, "are ze beegest fool ever born!"

"You—you get Reena and get her story. It's true!"

"I believe eet."

"Then cut me loose! Somebody should have come from Brade's. There's something wrong. Cut me loose, I tell you! I'll come back to you—I swear it."

"I weel go myself out there," said Lamont quickly in a low voice.

Zurdas had suddenly stopped his struggling and demanded:

"Why fight with me? You tryin' to arrest *me*? You try it! Try it an'—"

He left the threat in silence. Some of the men half apologetically protested that nothing of the kind was meant. A voice said that McGuire was never known to tell the truth. Another said—

"We'll make sure he doesn't escape hangin', Zurdas."

With that McGuire was grabbed and hustled along, and so they came to the icehouse near the rear of the Benz store. It was about ten feet square with double walls and the space between, on roof, sides and floor packed with sawdust. The ice venture failing, it had remained utterly unused.

One of the Benzes, with proprietory bustling, drew the peg from the staple on which the hasp was caught and pulled open the thick door. Heat as from an opened oven came into the peering faces that crowded there to look within under the lifted lantern.

"Whew! Hot all right."

"Serve 'em right."

"Sweat 'll do 'em good."

"In you go!" said some one, and shoved Pealo, who stumbled, fell and was kicked.

Mr. Morris, taking the lantern from Lamont, stepped inside and looked all about. The room was barren and stifling; sweat at once came out on him. He hurried from the room and breathed deeply, with relief, of the sea-cooled night air.

"That," he said, shaking his head, "would be barbarous. Just step in there, any of you, and see."

"But we'll cut a hole in the roof."

"Be —— sure it's a little one!"

"Leave 'em tied. How'd they get out with the whole roof off?"

"Benz, get an ax out o' the store."

"Have to keep guard anyhow. Some native might let 'em out."

"Oh yes, a guard. Sure!"

"Even with a good padlock?"

"Sure. Benz, bring a padlock too."

Presently the elder Benz came with an ax and heavy lock; and holding up the lock, said—

"Nopody can preak avay yet, heh?"

"I'll take the key," said Mr. Morris, and this was handed to him.

One of the men was boosted on to the shoulders of another, and from there climbed to the flat roof, which had just enough slope for drainage. The ax was handed up to him, then the lantern.

"Careful, Jim," he was warned. "Not a big hole."

"Big enough for plenty of air," said Mr. Morris.

"Take the whole roof off, you want. We'll leave 'em tied!"

The man Jim chopped away for a time vigorously, then called:

"Another or two o' you come up here. This is not so soft—or rather too —— soft! Ax just sinks in this blasted sawdust."

Other axes were brought, other men mounted to the roof. Chopping went on and much swearing at the sawdust. Men began to make jesting comment on the Benz enterprise in trying to furnish ice to Kialo.

Zurdas remained sullen and Mr. Morris seemed a little resentful of badinage almost like merriment. Once he drew his watch and, holding it under the lantern, gazed at it studiously, then said to Lamont:

"Perhaps Reena has come by this time. At least Harris should be back."

Lamont, at that moment lighting a cigaret, quite by accident cast the light of the match into Zurdas' face. The expression of the sidelong glance Zurdas had fixed on Mr. Morris had in it so much of malevolent intensity, the tilt of his head and half sneer of a grin was so like contempt and a sort of gloating, that Lamont stared with startled wonderment until the match-flame stung his fingers. He dropped the match, stamped on it as if on a dangerous insect, scraped the ground with his feet and had no idea of what he was doing, for the thought that had jumped into his head was—

"Zurdas has killed that girl!"

He cast the thought out, not being able to believe it; but he did feel that something mysterious was wrong. Here he had detected Zurdas in an expression of half-sneering security as if he were without fear of what the girl might tell; yet but a very few minutes before he had lost control of himself in anger at McGuire for speaking of what she would and could tell. Had he been infuriated lest they might believe McGuire? How much more then should he dread what Reena, a girl whose beauty would predispose all men in her favor, might tell? And had not Zurdas' threat on the veranda hinted at her too?

Lamont was puzzled. He decided that he would take a man or two with him, say nothing to the others and go to Brade's himself to learn what he could. Something was wrong. He sensed it. But it seemed to him that his imagination fumbled stupidly in trying to guess what this might be.

He at once lighted another match, but Zurdas' back was turned. He took the lantern from Mr. Morris and contrived to look at Zurdas' face, but his expression was now morosely inscrutable.

The hole had been chopped through and sawdust was scattered like a snowfall. The lantern was lowered through the roof. Some one called:

"There you are! How's that?"

Men looked inside. A voice said—

"All right!"

Another answered:

"All right ——! They can jump up, catch hold an' crawl out."

"Leave 'em tied they won't."

"Let the guard stay on the roof."

"You be the guard, then."

"Not me, 'less they put a bunk up there."

"Make sure they're good an' tied."

Thus half joking they talked as men got off the roof. When some one said, "Empty McGuire's pockets an' make sure the lashings are fast," Lamont held the lantern for those who made the inspection, and he saw that McGuire's wrists were ringed and raw with trying to get loose; he saw that Pealo had not so much as scratched his skin with struggling.

"Ze difference between ze black an' ze white man, monsieurs, is not a matter of ze good God's paint-pot. No, monsieurs, eet is under ze skin, deep."

No one knew what he meant, but some, since it sounded like a joke, laughed.

McGuire, his pockets having been emptied, was shoved inside, and in after him, Pealo. The thick door was pushed shut. The heavy lock was snapped in the staple.

McGuire and Pealo were left in utter darkness.

Faintly, but without a distinct word

drifting through the airhole overhead, McGuire could hear the men's voices. Presently these grew fewer, lower in tone, and ceased.

The hole in the roof gave no light. The night was clear but the ice-house was overshadowed by foliage. It was dark within as in a dungeon—hot, breathless, still, with faint night-noises. The rustling of palms was like the timid patter of rain.

"Will they kill us?" Pealo asked in a whisper. His voice sounded very far away, as if coming from across a large empty room.

"Not if we get out of here," said McGuire, replying in English, replying less to Pealo than to himself.

McGuire's wayward years, his companionship with desperate men, his own inventive trickery, had schooled him in the belief that there was always some way out of every hole or corner. He had heard it said that a guard would be left; and now he began kicking as hard as he could against the wall and telling Pealo to yell.

"Yell as if I was killing you!"

McGuire himself began to shout and swear. Then he heard a voice call—

"What's the matter in there?"

"Yell, Pealo, yell!"

Pealo yelped half-heartedly, much as if afraid of the sound of his own voice. McGuire kicked and yelled, hoping to get the door open, wanting at least the chance to talk to whoever it was that had been left on guard.

"Yell!" said McGuire, and redoubled his own yelling.

The man outside, more excitedly, bellowed to ask what was going on; and McGuire kept up the commotion, hoping to make it seem that he had got his hands free and was beating Pealo revengefully.

But apparently the ruse had no effect on the guard, for when McGuire paused to listen there was not a sound to be heard. He called, saying, "I've killed this black," but there was no answer. It was as if the guard had walked off or gone to sleep.

"That's done no good," McGuire said. "We'll try something else. Come here to me. I'll chew that lashing off your wrist, then you free mine. We can jump for that hole, then scramble through, drop off the roof and make a break for it."

Fumblingly in the dark, moving like armless blind men, he and Pealo came together. He made Pealo lie down, face down; kneeling over him, McGuire fumbled with his mouth for the cords on Pealo's wrists and gnawed, chewing and grinding. He kept it up, chewing as a starving man on leather, desperately, and seemed to make no impression at all. His teeth soon began to ache as from a toothache, but he did not stop. His knees from kneeling seemed blistered, his shoulder still ached, his own wrists burned. The position strained the neck muscles so that the pain became agonizing, but McGuire did not stop.

And there, chewing the cord on a crippled native's wrists, in pitch darkness, sweating as if his flesh were a wet sponge and that had been squeezed, McGuire recalled how of late he had been bruised and battered, all but broken and killed, and even now his muscles burned and nerves throbbed with a kind of torture; and of a sudden, then and there, it seemed to him that this late ill-luck and pain was indeed a sort of expiation, as if it were something somehow deserved, a punishment for wastrel laziness and drifting.

There stirred within him the almost superstitious sensation of being challenged by some dark fate to show himself worthy of better luck. This was a feeling, not a thought shaped in words, or any reasoned thing; an emotion that seemed to give him a kind of pride in pain, a bitter satisfaction in the very aching of his flesh.

At last McGuire sat up and reeled back against the wall. He could hardly speak, but said—

"One's in two—now work your hands loose."

His mouth was sore and dry, his teeth

ached as if they had been filed. In twisting his neck to ease the pain of the muscles his head spun with dizziness.

Pealo, jubilant, pulled, his hands free and pawed at McGuire, who rolled over, face down. Pealo fumbled excitedly, but fumbled only. The tight knots would not give way to his fingers. He too tried chewing, but when his teeth ached he quit, and soon wailingly said he could do nothing.

McGuire swore at him, then stopped, startled into listening as a heavy blow was struck against an outside wall. Again the blow. McGuire got to his feet, paused a moment, listening, then blundered across the small room, bringing up against the wall sooner than he expected. Again the sound of something striking hard followed by a creaking as of a bolt being forcibly drawn.

McGuire hopefully guessed that some one, perhaps David Brade, was forcing the lock. McGuire called out—

"Who's there?" Then he waited, listening intently.

Boldly the voice of Zurdas answered—

"I'm coming in there after you!"

McGuire leaned against the wall and stared into the darkness.

Zurdas again struck against the door. With something that was not serving as well as he wished, he was prying off the lock.

McGuire took a step forward and stopped. The darkness was utterly blinding.

"Pealo! Pealo, get my hands loose or we're both dead men!"

Then by the sounds he knew that Pealo had jumped with crippled hobbling for the hole overhead, snatching for a handhold there. A shower of sawdust came down through the darkness like the swarming of gnats as Pealo frantically tried to pull himself up. With even the strength fright gave him he did not have the strength to sway his body up waist-high. He dangled, with legs flying wildly. His bare feet brushed against McGuire whose first angered impulse was to grope as well as he could with hands behind him, seize Pealo by foot or ankle and pull him down. Then, impulsively, McGuire used the only means he had to help Pealo have a chance to escape. He braced himself and stooped, putting his back under Pealo's groping feet.

"—wouldn't be caught in —— with you. Get out o' here!"

Pealo, thus getting a sort of footing, wriggled in fright and so squeezed through.

"Lie quiet there—quiet! He'll hear you."

Pealo made no reply, but did lie quietly like a hunted rabbit crouched in the shadow of a bush.

CHAPTER XI

THE DOOR opened. Zurdas had a lantern. He held it above his head as he bent forward and stared within. In the other hand he held the revolver.

McGuire was backed against a wall. The light dazzled his eyes. He squinted, blinking, as he tried to look hard at Zurdas, and read his purpose at a glance.

Zurdas' savage grin was a mere writhing of muscles about the mouth, a twisted grimace of pursed lips and twitching jaw. His head, his arms, even his body moved with a slight jerky wavering. His black eyes glowed, but the frown seemed as much from the strain of peering, from holding the focus of his gaze, as from anger. Zurdas was drunk.

His grunt intoned satisfaction and menace. He nodded slightly, quickly, and again made throaty sounds like the beginning of breathless laughter.

Zurdas took one step toward McGuire, then paused and drew back, blocking the door as he stared, swaying the lantern about and staringly examining the barren corners of the room. Every inch of space lay open to view. He waved the lantern high and low and with jerky twist of head, incredulously blinking, searched for what he could not see; then—

"Where's that —— nigger?"

"Gone for another shotgun."

"Hunhn?" Zurdas asked with startled growl.

"Been gone half hour or more."

"Gone! How?"

McGuire looked up with toss of head. Zurdas followed the glance, stared a moment, pointed upward with the revolver.

"There? How?"

"Men who'd tied 'im up were glad for what he'd done. Made the knots loose. He'll get you next."

Zurdas did not understand, could not understand why a man who knew he was about to die would not beg to live. With waggling unsteady aim he held the revolver toward McGuire's head and grimaced watchfully.

McGuire, with head lowered, stared desperately alert, meaning to try to dodge and fall as the gun went off, hoping to be left for dead. It was not really hope but the only thing he could do, though about as hopeless as trying to fly by flapping of hands. He stared and waited for that something keener than sight that might possibly warn him of the instant; then, tense with strain, said—

"Shoot!"

Zurdas let the gun sink until it dangled at his side and, with a kind of guttural sneering:

"Shoot? Like ——! I'm glad that nigger's gone. Had to hide both your bodies. Nobody's goin' know what's happened to you. You I want. Get the nigger any time. Got you! Got her, too!"

"You've what?"

Again the sneering sort of grunt.

"I'll show you what. I'm Zurdas! You'll see—both you!"

With preoccupied fumbling he poked the gun toward the holster, for a time patiently missing; then he nosed the muzzle under the flap and put the gun away.

"Glad that nigger's gone," he repeated. With many curses, "Don't think, do you, anybody'll ever know I broke that lock? Your friends done it. An' I'll raise —— 'cause you got away—never seen again, you won't be. You'll see!"

Zurdas had wrath and cause for wrath at McGuire, but enjoyed thus letting him know what he could do, planned to do. The upheld lantern waggled. Zurdas made sounds something like broken laughter.

"Friends—huh! They're fightin' fire at Brade's. Said I'd do it. Do what I say. But they don't know. Think what they —— please. Can't prove it. Nobody ever proves anything 'gainst me. You'll see. They'll never find your body. You got away an' hid. I'll raise ——! I'll have old Morris crazy. 'Cuse him o' lettin' you get away. Her too, both you—I'll do it!"

"Reena!"

Zurdas' reply was as if words were too weak, and brute-like sounds conveyed the better meaning. Having expressed in growls his anger, satisfaction, menace, he gloatingly explained:

"Fellow that was out here to make sure nobody let you out, he come runnin' pop-eyed to the club. Said you'd killed the nigger. I said, 'Good. Set down an' have a drink.' He did. Two'r three other men there keepin' me company said 'good' too. They're all drunk by now.

Nobody can drink glass for glass with me. Nobody. I said I was goin' home an' would take Manuel's horse home too. Been tied there all this time. Meant to tie you an' the nigger on it. Now jus' have to tie you. I was comin' down here to get you out anyhow if I had to crack that guard's head from behind—make people think your friends done it! You think you're smart. I'm smarter. You'll see!"

"But Reena! What—where's Reena?"

"You'll see. Huh! Was comin' to town late 'safternoon, know why? So men would see me here, know I was here when fire broke out at Brade's. I know how to fix people. I'll teach 'em. Mill's burned—barns, stores, house too, by this time. I was comin' to town. Met Harris ridin' out. 'Where you goin'?' 'To bring that girl. Morris wants 'er, an' Cullum!'

"Know what I done? I rode back to Symonds'. Told servants to get clear off

an' stay off or I'd skin 'em alive. Then I come back an' waited on the road. She come—alone. Fire'd broke out at Brade's an' Harris stayed to help 'em fight it. Lucky he did—for him! She'd jumped his horse an' come alone. So I got 'er. Took 'er home. I said, 'You're my boy's wife. I'll go to town an' bring him. Then we'll see if— I come, but you—you—"

Memory of what he had found brought a blaze of fury into Zurdas' face. He swore violently, and the lantern in one outstretched hand held near McGuire's head danced in a kind of frantic jiggling as, with the other, he clawed in hasty fumbling at his holster; meaning, he said, then and there to kill. He drew the gun, then seemed in a half-dazed way to hesitate and, with a mumbling as if answering himself, said:

"No, no, no—got to make 'em think you 'scaped, an' cuss old Morris for lettin' you, you——!"

He, meaning to have now at least the satisfaction of bruising McGuire, struck drunkenly with the heavy gun's barrel. McGuire, by a twisting dodge and jerk, caught only a glancing blow but dropped as if knocked unconscious.

Zurdas stared in the blank gaping of disappointed surprize and bent forward with head stretched out and down.

"Get up!" he said loudly, but there was doubt in his voice. "Get up!" he repeated, and kicked so as to awaken McGuire, but McGuire lay sprawled in the awkward posture of a man knocked senseless.

Then Zurdas set the lantern on the floor by McGuire's head and got down to his knees, bending low, peering. He put the gun's muzzle to McGuire's head and said—

"I'll shoot!"

He waited. There was no sign of life.

"——'im," said Zurdas, working slowly with both hands to help again put the gun into its holster. "You ain't dead," he muttered, but without assurance.

With heavy thumb he poked and pried at McGuire's eyelid and raised it. He bent close with frowning stare, watching. Zurdas' vision was slightly hazy. He saw nothing that made him sure McGuire was not unconscious.

"Dead?" Zurdas grumbled, not believing it, not wanting to believe it. "—— eggshell for a skull! I got 'o see if he is dead."

He struck a match, crouched over the body and put the flame to McGuire's fingers. The fingers flinched. Zurdas laughed brutally, pleased, relieved.

McGuire, as well as he could, opened his eyes with the dazed look of a man just recovering consciousness.

"Been lucky I had killed you. Luck for you. Up an' come with me."

He jerked at McGuire, making and helping him rise; and when McGuire was on his feet Zurdas thrust his face almost against McGuire's and, with jeering snarl:

"You're goin' 'scape now. Friends got you off! An' her— Men think she's crazy now. When I'm done, she will be! You'll see—"

He clamped his hand on McGuire's shoulder, jerked him about and lifted the lantern to see whether his wrists were still well tied; then he put the lantern back on the floor and, with grip on McGuire's arm, pushed him toward the door, saying—

"Get along or I'll—"

They went, leaving the lantern there.

Outside, both stumbled through the shadows, for it was difficult walking, since Zurdas' feet were just a little unsteady and he pushed and pulled drunkenly at McGuire, holding firmly as if afraid McGuire, even with hands tied, might get away.

They had not far to go. Zurdas had ridden from the club to the front of the store, leading Manuel's horse. All day the horse had stood at the shaded hitching rack before the club, stamping and dozing until Manuel should be ready to return home.

Now when they came to where the horses were tied, Zurdas boosted McGuire into the saddle and tied his ankles to the stirrups and the stirrups under the horse's

belly. Taking the reins into his own hands, he mounted his horse and set off, soon quickening the horses into a gallop.

McGuire, a poor horseman at best, with hands behind him and riding faster than ever in his life, was jolted and bounced. He reeled and swayed, repeatedly his neck seemed to crack and pains came into his sides. If he could have loosened his feet he would have thrown himself headlong, risking a neck-break to escape not only Zurdas but such a seat of torture as this saddle.

And so they rode to Symonds', entering the shadowed, lonely grounds with flying clatter of hoofs. Zurdas drew up before the unlighted house. He dismounted. The ride had partly sobered him. He came to where McGuire reeled drunkenly in the saddle and, without a word cut loose McGuire's feet from the stirrups then, reaching up, jerked him from the saddle but kept a firm grip, as if afraid that McGuire might even now get away.

McGuire was exhausted; his legs were weak. He staggered and would have fallen but Zurdas yanked him up and, swearing, said:

"No tricks now. You try more on me—I'll skin you alive!"

Powerfully half dragging McGuire, he hustled him up the steps and into the house.

Zurdas broke two matches in trying to strike a light. The third lifted a tiny flame. He held it up and out before him. The caution with which he moved to shelter the match as he half dragged McGuire along at his side was that of one moving stealthily in an unfamiliar room.

McGuire at once began peering from side to side in the flickering dimness to catch if he could a glimpse of Reena.

By the table was still the same chair into which only the night before Zurdas had thrown McGuire. Now with a shove Zurdas set him there again.

"Don't move!"

Then Zurdas lighted the lamp.

McGuire, with neck twisted awry, looked peeringly on all sides. He said—

"Where is she?"

Zurdas, fitting the chimney, turned as if the question exasperated him.

"You'll see an' wish you hadn't!" Words that followed were evilly obscene. Gloating, he said, "Nobody'll doubt she's crazy now!"

He grinned and watched to see how hard those words had hit. McGuire stared up at him. Zurdas, with feet wide apart, one hand on his hip, the other pulling at the ends of his mustache, stared down at McGuire.

"You've lied, Zurdas!"

"Not much—" he reached out toward the whisky bottle. He picked it up, looked at it, shook it, then tossed the bottle to the floor. "It's not truth yet. But will be 'fore morning!"

Zurdas thought he had, partly by favoring luck, got hold of both Reena and McGuire without any one's being able to say he had laid hand on either. People might guess haphazardly what they liked. He very clearly saw now that when he had disposed of the horse on which he had brought Reena from the highway to the plantation, he might do as he pleased. Could he not say, accusingly, that friends had helped McGuire escape from the improvised jail? That McGuire and Reena had fled together into hiding, at last, somehow without being seen, to get off the island?

He had at the first chance got hold of Reena, meaning then that she should be and remain Manuel's wife, since the law had given him the right to keep her under his roof, or rather his son's roof. As for public indignation over that Honduras story—nothing much now would come of it. Zurdas knew he had most cunningly squirmed out of a damning confession in saying that she was Symonds' daughter. He would stand by that as an oath. He would swear the mother had said it. Who could disprove it, or would try? Only McGuire and Reena.

Zurdas thought all she knew of Honduras was what McGuire had told her; and he had meant to knock that out of

her head so that she would have been a docile, even if slightly mad, daughter-in-law. Pealo had changed the matter of legal rights, but not Zurdas' opportunity to do what he vengefully pleased. Without yet being fully determined in the plan, it now seemed as if it might be best to put both out of the way, since the manner of their disappearance could be made to seem that of flight together, she running off with the fugitive McGuire.

It was now a part of Zurdas' way of torture to say and seem to mean, perhaps even half-way to mean:

"When I've finished she'll be —— unlovely. Crazy, too. Make you crazy, too, to see her that way, heh? Then I'll do it!"

Zurdas laughed, and the laughter was such as seemed to confirm the threat.

He then with long strides crossed the room and jerked open a cabinet door. As he stooped to reach within he turned his head and paused, watching. McGuire sat up stiffly, leaning forward. Zurdas waited, but McGuire sank back.

" 'Fraid to try it, eh? Try all the —— tricks you like this night!" Zurdas took from a shelf a bottle and corkscrew and came back to the table. Putting the bottle on the table and beginning to bore into the cork, he asked, taunting, "Why didn't you try it, eh?"

"Where is she, Zurdas? Here? In this house?"

More than Zurdas guessed hung on the answer, for McGuire had hate for him stronger than any hate he had ever felt, more venomous. For once, if not indeed for the only time in his wayward and often evil life, McGuire wanted to kill, not merely to escape, not even only as just punishment, but for the pleasure of killing him whom he hated.

The outrage with which Reena was menaced had filled McGuire with an anger that would probably have been suicidal if he had given way to it. What McGuire had been about to do when Zurdas saw him start up from the chair was to overturn the lamp, spilling oil and flame on the dry mat that, if fire licked it, would blaze as if strewn with powder. He himself might or might not have been able to dodge out of the room; it would have been a chance and he would have taken it but for the fear that Reena was indeed a prisoner in the house.

Death, even such a death, would be better than enduring what Zurdas threatened her with, but McGuire could not willingly bring such death upon her.

Something had to be done and would be done. Were it not for Reena, he would knock the lamp flying in the hope that fire would lick the floor and soon be roaring up the walls and into the thatched roof. If the lamp went out as it fell, there would be darkness; he might then with tumbling lunge go through a window and scramble off into the jungle. But go and leave Reena helpless with this brute?

All the while he thought of these things, and others, he twisted and pulled at the cords on his wrists, willing to strip away skin and flesh if he could but secretly get his hands free. Yet there was no need to wait longer before making a try at something desperate if convinced that Reena was not in the house; so he had asked, "Where is she? Here? In this house?" though in asking it he had not expected truth out of Zurdas but hoped to be able to judge by the answer just how much Zurdas lied.

"Here? In this house?" Zurdas repeated, preoccupied with pulling out the cork. He tossed corkscrew and cork together on the table and reached for a glass. "I can say yes without goin' to look." He jerked back his head and tossed the liquor down his open mouth, then filled the glass again. "That's how well I tied her up."

"I don't believe it," said McGuire, really believing it but wanting to be thoroughly convinced.

"Huh! —— little I care what you believe!" Zurdas answered, opening a drawer under the table. "Lucky thing I come back an' kicked the servants out of here when I knew she was goin' to be along the road soon. Done it because the only fellows I could trust to keep an eye on her were over at Brade's, starting fires."

He had removed an air-tight tin of cigars from the drawer. He held a match at the top of the lamp-chimney, bit off an end of the cigar, lighted it, puffed. "I thought the servants might turn 'er loose 'fore I got back from town. So now nobody, not even a nigger, knows I've even seen her tonight—nobody but you. And you—I don't think you'll ever tell! So I'll do what I —— please with her, and when I'm done you'll both be dead."

Zurdas spoke with a cool sort of sneering, much as if half to himself rather than to make McGuire shudder. As he spoke he turned up his sleeves and opened the shirt at his throat. Then he took up the whisky-glass again and filled it. As he was raising the glass he asked with a kind of jeering:

"Last night you begged for whisky. What's the matter now? Lost your tongue?"

"No."

"Want a drink, heh?"

"No."

"Have if you want it? Beg me. Let me hear you beg for it."

"No."

Zurdas swallowed the liquor, then said—

"All right, I'll give you a little drink."

He filled the glass and held it out near McGuire's mouth.

"No."

"Brace you up. Be better able to stand what's comin' to you. Your last chance for a drink this side o' ——! Not likely to get one there either, so the mishies say." The whisky he was pouring into himself seemed already to have touched his tongue a bit. "Better have it. I don't want you faintin' on me."

"No."

"Won't?" For a moment he seemed ready to pry McGuire's jaws open and pour the whisky into his mouth, just to show him that it could be done. Then, "All right. Drink it myself."

He did. The liquor, added to what had already soaked into his flesh from drinking at the club, made him appear to feel quite satisfied with this night's events and circumstances, though his murdered son, whom he had meant to forgive, lay unburied at Port Kingston.

He sucked on the cigar and blew smoke overhead.

"Know what I'm goin' do to you when I'm through with her first? Tell you what I've done to other men—"

He talked, and no doubt lied with the hope of making McGuire's bones seem to turn into tallow, for he spoke of eyelids cut away and salt sprinkled there—"hands tied behind, like yours now." Of eyes seared with coals and gouged out; of men bound neck-deep in ant-hills, their faces smeared with cane syrup; of other men hung head down over a slow fire; of all such things as a savage imagination could devise, and said that he had done them. He drank as he talked and was gloatingly cheerful. He said such things as these were mild to what McGuire would have; said:

"No man meddles with Zurdas without wishin' he hadn't—like Brade this night, burned out. You, I'll skin you alive an' make her watch an' hear you howl!" He laughed a little drunkenly and almost merrily over what he would say to Morris and Cullum for having let McGuire escape—"just as I told 'em you would."

"They'll know well enough you lie."

"How know?"

"Pealo was on the roof there."

"What's that?"

"Truth. He'd just scrambled up when you broke in."

"You're lying! You said he'd been gone for—"

"That was the lie. Think I wanted you to find him? No. I told him—"

"You're lying now!" Zurdas shouted. "Lying like you lied about that man from Honduras. You can't fool me. I won't believe you."

"Then don't. But what need to lie? I'd said to Pealo, 'We'll both be hung 'less we get out o' here.' I'd just chewed the cord off his wrist when we heard you—heard your voice—knew why you'd come."

"That nigger was there?"

"Aye, had just got up when you broke in. I'd said to him, 'Run, tell Morris, Cullum, everybody, Zurdas has got me!' But he had to lie quiet for fear you'd hear him stir, so there with an ear close above you he heard you say how you'd got Reena and what you meant to do. Bah, Zurdas, you talk of what you've done to men; do what you like with me, but put a hand to her and by the living God that hates such things as you, Dave Brade will tear you bone from bone and throw you to the dogs!"

So said McGuire, writhing up out of the chair. All he had to fight with was his tongue and the fury that made his eyes gleam with the light like prophecy. He expected his own death, but sensed the coward-spot in Zurdas' heart that dreaded the wrath of men made furious by his foul misdeeds. McGuire knew too that Zurdas was just as safe as if Pealo were dead, for the crippled black would sneak away and hide and say nothing of what he knew to any man; but Zurdas must not know that, so McGuire cursed him and taunted him, said men already had been stirred up in town and were on the road.

"But you—" Zurdas paused with bottle and glass in hands, glaring—"if all —— was comin' I'd kill you anyhow."

"But Reena! Let her go, then—"

"No!" he bellowed. "She's Manuel's wife. I got the right to have her here. Let 'em come!"

"They'll be here in an hour at most, and sooner. Touch her, and you'll have your slimy guts ripped out and used for a rope to hang you!"

At that, Zurdas, though he had just spoken with pleasure of various forms of torture, made a queer shuddering sound and gulped more whisky.

Zurdas, drunk, dazed by this blast of words, stared with uneasy frowning.

McGuire's bearing was defiant; he stood with shoulders back and head up, and there was a glitter in his eyes. Moreover, what he said had in it the shock of truth. The defiance gave Zurdas a confused half-frightened feeling that McGuire had reasons for not being afraid.

McGuire, with eyes closed and face turned up in a two seconds' silence, drew in his breath with gasping sob as he threw a wordless prayer toward Heaven. Somehow he had to get Reena out of this house and safely off, because men were not, as he had said, coming. The only way possible to get her off was to make Zurdas want to let her go.

He looked again at Zurdas and, in lowered tone but with words that seemed to have the weight of his whole body behind them, spoke slowly, clearly, driving each word into the drunken brain, said:

"You don't dare touch her. Yet, while she lives, unless you let her go now, she will tell men what I have told her to say. All lies, Zurdas—I can and will make her and all men believe they are all lies—if you let her go."

"Huh?" Zurdas growled drunkenly, interested, anxious. Then suspiciously, "But I won't let *you* go! Not if all —— was com—"

"To —— with me—it's Reena! And you're going to be a lot better off yourself, Zurdas, if you do as I say."

"Huh?" Zurdas stood with peering lurch, suspicious, yet confusedly trying to understand. "What you mean, huh?"

"Mean? This—" McGuire, aware that he was having to beat against the muddled ears of a man who now teetered drunkenly, used the words like blows to pound them in. "You think having said that Symonds *was* her father in just the way you said it will make men believe you didn't kill her father!"

"O' course," said Zurdas, jerking himself up confidently and fixing a suspicious stare on McGuire.

"Well they won't—not unless I, Zurdas, make them believe it. And I can. You let her go—I'll do it. You let her go, I'll make men say 'twas right you killed *me* when they break in on you here tonight and find that I am dead."

"Huh?" Zurdas asked, this time with long-drawn eagerly up-tilted inflection, and a brain-wrinkled scowl showed how hard his drunken cunning was trying to understand.

McGuire, knowing that timid words would not hold his attention though bold ones were likely to fire his anger, risked Zurdas' sudden violence with the shout—

"It's your —— neck you save, Zurdas, when you put her in a saddle and let her go!"

"Wha's 'at? What's 'at!" Zurdas snarled, with a fist weaving up and back across his shoulder.

"It's mine you'll have the right to break when she is gone, and in a way that men will praise you for it. When I see her go, Zurdas, I'll write and sign that I killed Symonds and had Manuel killed. I'll put it down that I bought Tomas and made up the lie that Reena believes about Honduras. Say the Preston woman and myself planned it together from what she'd overheard, though we knew Symonds *was* her father as you said today at Brade's. I'll say that Reena is half mad, which is why I tried the game to marry her—"

Something wrong with this —— whisky—weak as tea! Head seemed a clotted muddle with all thoughts crisscrossed. How understand why McGuire was offering to do this thing that would make all Kialo say that killing him was —— good riddance? Eh? There was a thought—

Zurdas, with jaw drunkenly slack, asked—

"You love that girl?"

"Aye, Zurdas, I do. That's truth and all of it. It's death for me anyhow, so to get her out of this I'll clear your name of what men think and confess to—"

Loved her? Love? Crazy fool! How or why love a woman he'd never see again? What good for him to do all this for her?

"—you can tell men, Zurdas, you knew I'd tell the truth if you got me alone."

The sound of horses coming? No. Just the horses stamping there outside the house; but what a start it gave—

"—that's why you pulled me out of the Benz jail and brought me here."

Blasted lamp was hazy. Made things seem to jiggle. This whisky—no taste at all. Ho, be —— if he hadn't tipped the empty bottle to a glass and tossed the empty glass to his mouth! Drunk? Never drunk. Couldn't get drunk. Nobody'd get drunk on an empty bottle—

"—so that's the way of it, Zurdas. And when men come, you then can say—"

What sound was that? Horses? Horses! Horses, men—they'd come! Quick! Quick or they'd be in before McGuire was dead! They'd take McGuire from him. Quick—quick!

Zurdas, with head bobbing unsteadily and turned to one side, listened. There were no horses coming, no men, no—not a sound.

Zurdas stared at the gun in his extended, unsteady hand. He blinked, frowning to clear his eyes of the shifting haze. For a moment his expression was flushed with the wonder of how the gun had got from the holster and what was it doing out there, pointed at McGuire? It might go off—kill him—kill him with a bullet, instead of fingers squeezing on his throat till eyes popped and tongue hung like a rag.

He waggled the gun at the holster, but missed it and poked about absently, even as low as his knee. The heavy gun's weight dragged his hand down. Not finding the holster, he simply held the gun and forgot he held it.

McGuire could tell by looking at him that Zurdas' thoughts were now blurred almost senselessly; any impulse might any instant make him crazily murderous.

So it was that, not knowing what he did, Zurdas lifted the gun, with unsteady waggling pointed it and meant to shoot, though a dazed hesitant expression seemed to cross his face; but a look of fury cleared this away as he shouted—

"To —— with all Ki'lo—I do it now!"

"You do it now?" McGuire shouted and took a long step nearer, standing right up against the gun's mouth to make his words the better heard and believed. "You do it now and men will never know I lied to say I looked through the window the night that Preston woman died and saw you—"

"*What?*" His arm dangled loosely at his side, the gun again forgotten, as Zurdas

put his face almost against McGuire's and glared, astounded. Reelingly drunk, he blurted, "You saw—saw what I—"

"Yes!"

"No! You didn't! You didn't see me—"

"How else know then?"

Zurdas, with staggering backward step and cursing, said—

"But you'll never tell I—"

Only the drunken fumbling of a finger that pressed the guard's loop instead of the trigger gave McGuire the second's time to say—

"I've told already."

Zurdas swayed back and took another backward step as if about to topple. With shuffle of feet he steadied himself a little, though it was with unsteady weaving of body that he then stood doubting, touched with fear, not knowing even what to dread but dreading something, and gazed wide-eyed at McGuire's thin savage face that blazed with a look of defiant truth.

"I've told already. But I can make it right again, though now it's worse for you than you think, Zurdas."

"You wasn't there," said Zurdas, half believing what he said.

"Oh yes I was, and this is how it happened. You know I'd put her up to spy on you, to listen, overhear and tell me all. That's how I guessed so much about Honduras. So that night you caught and brought her back, I waited here to have a word with her, as I'd done many times, through the window of her room. That's how I saw. You see yourself, that's truth."

And Zurdas, swearing, said:

"Yes I know y'put 'er up to it. I tol' y'so las' night. Why didn't you say las' night—window—saw—"

"You'd have brained me then had I told you how I knew, but now you listen to the rest of it and you'll understand. I told Morris and some other men—they believe me too. But you're a bad brute to handle, Zurdas. And they, afraid you'd get away from them, got off the island before a gunboat came to take you down to Sydney.

"They should have waited for a Britisher to come before they'd make the charge and let you know they knew. I'm the witness, Zurdas, and was to go along. You saw yourself tonight how Morris kept you off me. You saw how he took care that I should be well cared for, but did you see how he looked at you when he said *justice would be done?* That's what he meant—meant you, Zurdas! He may think that I had Manuel killed, but he knows too that you killed her! So—"

And Zurdas, made furious by all this and by the feeling that McGuire was somehow wriggling out from under his hands, growled—

"I'll kill ri'now!"

"Of course you will. But do it before I write down that what I've said of you is all a lie, and you will hang for the Preston woman's death—and mine too."

"I want that wrote!" Zurdas shouted excitedly, in a drunken way, now seeing the full importance of such confession; drunkenly seeing even more importance that he would have, being sober. "I want that wrote! You write it now! Now, y'hear me?"

"Write I will, but there are not enough demons in —— to make me write a word till I see Reena on horseback and ride away!"

"No," Zurdas answered stubbornly, shaking his head drunkenly. "You write it firs'. Y' can't fool me. I' know y' tricks. I let 'er go, you'd tell me to to ——! You write it firs'—you hear me?"

"No, Zurdas, I wouldn't say that to you. No, no, no." McGuire repeated "no" as convincingly as he could and wondered in a moment's frightened agony what he could say to make this stubborn drunken brute believe him. "No, Zurdas. When Reena goes, I'll write down what you say and this is why you know I will—Nobody gets the best of *you*, Zurdas. Those who break their word, get the worst of it with you, Zurdas—"

Zurdas sneered gloatingly, pleased that McGuire had learned so much.

"You see how well I know it."

McGuire seemed to have a sad, repentant air, though his narrowed eyes were as watchful as if their gaze were following the words, as a bowman with his arrows, to see where they struck. "You see how very well I know it, since the game I tried to play on you has brought me to this."

Zurdas nodded so heavily, with such satisfaction, that he had to shuffle his feet a little to keep his balance.

"So don't you see that if you let her go—why, Zurdas, when she's gone I'll have to write it then or else you will catch her some night soon again and make the —— dead ghost of me howl to see her butchered!"

"Yeright, yeright!" said Zurdas loudly. "Atswotuldo! Yeright!"

His feet were wide apart, braced firmly, but his body swayed with jerky wavering. His dark face lighted up with a sudden grin, for what a fool, blind, sick, love-sick fool, this McGuire! Huh! She could fall from a horse some day, as Tomas did. He would then be satisfied that she too had learned that nobody, nobody, ever made trouble for him without wishing he hadn't. Better still, this girl who might cause other meddlesome men to pry into his life and talk suspiciously about him, would then be as much out of the way as if he had this night done what he planned.

This sort of bargaining suited his drunken cunning. Less drunken and more suspiciously remembering how he had been tricked before, he might have found loose ends dangling in this web of McGuire's hasty weaving. Also, braggart that he was, pride in being too feared by Morris to be seized outright for the Preston woman's death, flatteringly helped Zurdas to believe that what McGuire had said of it was true. His guilt gave him the sort of fear that, out of dread lest the crime be known, readily persuaded him that it had become known.

"Let her go now, Zurdas, then I write and sign that the Preston woman funked it and, conscience-struck, fear-eaten, hanged herself; and that I saw her do it. I'll say you knew I did kill Symonds, and Manuel too for having seen me do it. I'll say that thus with my last breath—because you mean to kill me as justice should—I snatch at this last chance of God's mercy by putting down the truth. Now let Reena go."

"All right, awright. You write you told 'em lies—all lies!" The words were blurred into almost shapeless sound, but his pretense was that of honest outrage, his tone indignant. "Truth to say they're lies. You tell 'er now all lies; they are all lies. She's got to tell it, too—tell people how you lied—'n' you got to write it like I say. Say Symonds' 'er father an' you kill 'im. My boy, too. You—you 'mit it! An' that Pres'on fool—she hung 'erself. You saw 'er 'n' went an' lied 'bout me! Uhr-r I'll fix you, you——! You tell Reena now—all lies—you've 'mitted it, then you write it too."

Zurdas, with the gun still in one hand, reached out with the other and picked up the lamp. His hand was unsteady, his feet were unsteady, but no man had ever seen Zurdas too drunk to stand.

"Go 'head o' me—there—that door—She's there—next room—Symonds' room."

McGuire stopped before the closed door.

"Open it!" Zurdas shouted. He was not one full-length step behind McGuire but shouted as if standing far off. The whisky that had given no warmth seemed to have soured in his belly. He frowned and jerked his head, blinking to get rid of the moving haze that made objects shift about; this exasperated him, made his temper raw. "Open it!" he repeated again, loudly.

McGuire turned his back to the door, took the knob in his fingers, then pushed. The door opened.

II

McGUIRE stepped forward and peered into the shadows that danced from the wavering of the lamp Zurdas held unsteadily in the doorway.

At the far side of the room he saw a bed, and on the bed a form straight and

motionless. He lurched across, saying:

"Reena? Reena! Has this —— brute—"

There was a clatter of fallen glass. The lamplight suddenly sank into smoky dimness. Zurdas swore. He had struck the chimney against the doorway, shattering it.

He shouted at McGuire—

"Get back from there!"

His voice was hoarsely thick and had a drunken menace, as if he were suspicious of what McGuire might do.

McGuire did not move back until, having reached the bed, he had leaned over, in the gloom trying with one frantic moment's peering to discover if she lived or was dead. He saw that her eyes were open staringly, but there was life in them; and that she was bound with many turns of rope flat on the bed and had a strip of something white across her mouth.

Having seen this, McGuire did turn back toward Zurdas. Like an animal that will leave its leg in the trap he tugged with writhing jerk of body to break loose his wrists. He felt no pain, though the trickling of blood caused him presently a moment's wonder of how water had got on his hands.

Zurdas came from the door and, with the slow preoccupied jerkiness of movement that a drunken man uses in being careful, set the smoking lamp perilously near the edge of the rattan bedside table.

"Way fr'm there, I tol' you!" he growled, with such blurred speech as to seem only a growl.

With disjointed stagger he came close to McGuire and lifted his hand, his right hand with the gun in it, up and over his shoulder as if to bring it down on McGuire's head.

McGuire moved aside and back, slowly circling Zurdas so as to reach and stand near the head of the bed. Like an angel's presence, there came suddenly to McGuire the thought, with hope in it, that Zurdas was drunkenly on the edge of collapse. He now hardly knew at all what he was doing, and there were moments when a blank expression would come on his face. His eyelids dropped and hovered half-closed as if he could not open them, but they would pop again wide open with confused, suspicious staring.

"More light," said Zurdas, blinking, seeming to think it was the dimness of the smoking wick that made it so difficult for him to see clearly.

"That's losing time, Zurdas." McGuire spoke with the best tone of coaxing that he could use. "Let's let her go."

Zurdas' answering growl had vaguely the sound "You shut up!" and he swayed about, glowering at McGuire. Then his head nodded, bobbed and came up with a jerk like a man that dozes lightly on his feet when stirred into wakefulness.

"Light, more light—see what I'm doin'— See you in ——! Come here to me— Come-ere, tell you!" Then explosively, "Get way from there!" His voice was now almost inarticulate. What he said could be barely guessed at, though McGuire understood the words fairly well because he so well understood Zurdas himself. "Uhgoangetayfrumair? Huh?"

McGuire moved again. Zurdas stared for a time doubtfully, then seemed satisfied and, mumbling about more light, turned to Symonds' writing desk near a window.

Zurdas' manner for the next two or three minutes had much the elaborate unsteadiness of a clownish acrobat who plays at solemn drunkenness; there was the intent, patient fiddling that often the drunken have in laboring with some simple thing.

He picked a match from the match-tray. At first he repeatedly scratched the lifeless end of the match, then cast it down and took another, with better luck this time, bringing fire. Then he gingerly laid the gun on the desk and lifted, or rather with wobbling twist pulled off, the lamp's chimney and held it in a jerky, waggling way, not at all watching what he did, so that it seemed the chimney would any moment be dropped or broken.

His match went out as he poked it about the wick. With unsuspected patience he fumbled again and again in the tray.

At last, clumsily getting three or four matches together, he scratched savagely and poked the flare at the wick. When the fire touched his fingers he waggled his hand hastily and the matches went out as he threw them down; but a thread of fire remained on the wick and soon lifted a wavering yellow flame, tipped with smoke.

Zurdas grunted. Then with both hands firmly on the bulbous sides of the chimney, he brought it down much as if gently pounding. Many times he missed the springy prongs, but finally got the chimney set and, though it was not secure, it stayed in place. Then the flame cleared itself of smoke. Light filled the room.

Zurdas turned, and for a moment seemed wondering what it was all about. Then, vaguely remembering, he said to McGuire—

"Now I c'n see kill you— Choke you death—"

He sagged into a kind of crouch as if about to rush, stumblingly. Then, steadying himself, his hand rested on the writing desk and touched the gun he had put there and would have forgotten, at least for a time, but that the devil seemed to guard his drunkennenss. Zurdas' fingers closed on it without the least apparent thought of what he was doing.

Powerful man, hard and hard-headed drinker that he was, this night he had perhaps put more whisky in less time down his throat than ever in his life, and it was playing on him some of the tricks that whisky plays on men who play the fool with it. His head was jangled; he could not see straight nor stand steady, yet his impulse was to kill, kill brutally.

But something now tugged against the impulse in a way that confused him so that the look of staring blankness crossed his big bony face . He came with swaying lurch at McGuire, roaring, "Why don't I kill you?" but there was the honest sound of a baffled question in the shout.

McGuire moved quickly back; then edging farther back more slowly, so there would be no look of fear in thus putting more distance between them, said:

"You're first to turn her loose. Give her a horse."

In moving back along the side of the bed, McGuire came almost against the rattan bedside table where the lamp had been left; and his fingers, squirming and closing like nervous captive things, were suddenly scorched. With startled movement, McGuire half turned and glanced behind him as he jerked his forearms against the small of his back and closed his fingers tightly to ease the burn; then he took a step forward to be clear of the lamp and continued:

"Men are coming! Pealo's told she's here. Send her off—I write what I promised you!"

Zurdas eyed him with a kind of solemn staring. His feet, braced wide apart, stood fast, but his big body wavered, now bending back as if to topple backward, now sagging sidewise, now in a weaving forward in a lurch from which, somehow, his muscles pulled him up before he fell. Then his brain, struggling against the stupor of drunkenness, seemed to hammer through its warning. He understood the warning in a vague uneasy way.

"I'm drunk!" he said unexpectedly, thus seeming to repeat what his brain with its last weak flicker of good sense was trying to tell him. "But know what I'm doin'." This was hardly an intelligible blur of words, but was in the manner of self-argument, a kind of answer to himself. "Know what I'm doin'," he said again. "Show you I do!"

And just as if he did know, with either lucky snatches or else by a moment's sobering surge of self-control, he, with only a little fumbling, pulled the slip knot of the long rope that had been wound many times round and round both the bed and Reena's out-stretched body. He then loosened the coils of rope.

Reena, when her hands came free, worked with frightened haste to untie the strip torn from a pillow-case and bound across her mouth. She slipped the rope down off her breast and sat up, her dark eyes fixed in a widened stare at Zurdas, who stood near the foot of the bed,

scowling and teetering. The knots of the cloth being fast, her fingers numb, she could not take it off.

McGuire was watching anxiously, and said to her—

"Pull it down, down over your chin!"

"Tell her you lied!" Zurdas shouted. The words ran thickly together; the sound was "Teleruhied," accompanied by a waggling of hand.

"Reena! Reena, listen! You must go. Zurdas has said you could go—"

"Teleruhied!"

Reena's loosened hair fell about her face and shoulders. Her face was pale with fright, but as the gag slipped she put out one hand toward Zurdas and, pleading, said:

"Oh please let us go together! Oh I'll say anything, too, that you want. I heard—" her lifted hand indicated the open space above the partition's plate rail, left open for the better circulation of air through the rooms—"heard what he promised, but I will not go unless Dan goes too."

"Y'ont?" Zurdas shouted, and with steadying left hand against a foot-post of the bed, sagged far forward with mouth open as if to yell at her again; but he did not yell, and his mouth being open was like the yawning snarl of a beast.

Reena trembled, shrinking. She pushed and kicked to free herself of the loosened coils that, having slipped down from her throat and breast, were now about her waist; and though they were loose, the only way to be wholly clear of them was to crawl out, but the high head-board of the American bed was like a wall in preventing her readily doing that.

"Oh please, please, Zurdas, please! We will say to everybody that it was lies, all lies—that Mr. Symonds *was* my father and that you have always been good to me. But I wouldn't, I can't, I won't go without—"

She put a hand out toward McGuire.

"Y'ont?" Zurdas bellowed, and sagged still farther forward, with mad drunken anger blazing in his face.

McGuire's words were like a prayer as he cried:

"Reena! Child! Oh, Christ! Oh God, you must!"

Reena leaned forward with both hands out toward Zurdas. Her voice with rapid pleading dropped low, rose high, ran through all the inflections of a sweet-voiced woman praying passionately for more than her own life as she begged:

"Oh, Zurdas, Zurdas, please let us go together, off the island—anywhere! Oh, I will tell everybody, everybody, that you have always been good to me and it was wrong of me to tell lies of you. I know what Dan has told you, but I will not go! I tried to cry out, 'no, no!' when I heard what he was saying. But together we will say anything you want us to say, and make people hate us for having been so wicked. Oh please, and I will pray God to bless you, though I know—I have always known—about my father and—and—"

Zurdas gave a start. Surprize, with even fear in it, seemed for a moment smeared on his face. Though McGuire, who knew the danger and saw it gathering in a squint-like frown as Zurdas' lips drew away from his teeth, shouted:

"Reena, no! Not that—don't say that! Stop! It isn't so! Zurdas, she lies!"

Even with that warning in her ears, Reena anxiously misread Zurdas' look for a sign of yielding fear and cried with passionate menace:

"I do not lie, but as a child heard my mother pray for God to hate you! As a child I overheard you talk, oh horribly, to Mr. Symonds! You laughed, Zurdas—you laughed to talk of murdering my poor father, and you said there was no way under heaven for me to know what you had done! But I do know! And I will tell—tell about Tomas and Miss Preston and—"

"Reena! Zurdas don't believe her! It's all what I told her to say to Brade, to Morris, Cullum—lies! Zurdas, she lies!"

"—tell everybody. Everybody! You murdered my father, Tomas, Miss Preston and now Dan McGuire!"

McGuire, with face up-turned and eyes shut in frantic helplessness, groaned. At that moment Zurdas bellowed:

"Will? Y'won't! For —— you—"

Reena's scream was cut off by the roar of the heavy revolver. The gun's smoke rolled low over the bed, then like a thin mist lifted quickly and floated off in filmy wisps through the still air of the room. She lay huddled forward, and the loosened dark, thick hair fell like a kindly veil to hide what had been done.

McGuire's curses were more drunken than any Zurdas had that night uttered. He reeled, staggering back. Again the wavering smoky flame of the lamp behind him burned his fingers; again he jerked his hands against the small of his back. The next moment pain streaked his face as with a brush, for he then bent back, far backward, with arms rigidly out-thrust behind him. His crossed wrists were dipped into the smoking flame of the broken lamp chimney, and he held them there—held them there though every muscle of his body struggled to make him take his wrists away.

Zurdas growled, and the sound was not unlike that of a beast pleased with its kill. He faced McGuire, saw the pain and grinned, thinking it was fear and that the backward bent posture was desperate shrinking.

"You now!" said Zurdas, sounding the words deep in his throat without the least movement of lips.

To heighten dread of him, he moved slowly with the gun lifted in a wavering aim. He leered, pleased to see McGuire writhe, and thought the writhing was dread of death, so by way of torment he did not at once press the trigger. He himself, being wholly drunk, did not know what instant he might shoot.

McGuire jerked; jerked, twisted and pulled to break the cords the moment they would weaken enough to be broken. In his frantic anxiety, in the rigid struggling against the impulse of his own muscles to draw his wrists away, in his desperate jerking to break the cords as soon as they would break, he could not hold his arms steady so that the flame would bite in one place and thus burn through the sooner. It was only by painful guess-work that he held his wrists where the flame would bite at all on the cords. It seemed as if the cords would never char and come apart, though sizzle and smell of scorched flesh rose.

The look on Zurdas' face meant that any instant he might shoot; something had to make him hesitate, pause, wait for perhaps another second, perhaps a long half-minute.

Then McGuire's eyes suddenly flashed wide with fixed staring. Pain helped to make them bulge. Their look was not at Zurdas but behind him. McGuire yelled. The yell had the sound of terror, and pain helped again to make him seem fear-shocked.

"What's that? What's that? Ghost! My God—behind you, Zurdas, the ghost of Reena's father!"

A kind of gasping yelp sounded in Zurdas' throat and, shrinking, he turned with an arm up-lifted, face high as if to ward a blow. He peered in blinking fright, looking right and left, stared everywhere and saw nothing; but he felt that thing was there behind him, somewhere, and could be seen if he only knew where to look. With a hasty, unsteady sidling turn of feet he shifted about to find just where it was McGuire's eyes were fixed in seeing this ghost-thing.

At that moment McGuire leaped with hands flying out and up; and Zurdas' revolver, half raised with hasty jerk, went off harmlessly.

Zurdas was wholly drunk, but he was still that Zurdas who, half drunk, had fought with strong men. Out of his powerful muscles there came even now a strength that half-way steadied him so that, though struck by McGuire's flying weight, he staggered and shuffled awkwardly with body distorted in grotesque weaving, but did not fall. He swung up the gun to strike, for McGuire was at his throat, clawing, kicking, driving at Zurdas' groin and belly with upward

bend of knee, trying wildly to kill, as a beast kills, a man almost twice his weight.

McGuire was as crazed as ever a man that rattled chains in Bedlam. He knew nothing of what he did, sobbing a prayer that was a curse—

"God kill you—kill you!"

A flash of instinct sent McGuire's hand clutching up at Zurdas' arm as the arm fell, and the blow missed; then with sudden twist he locked Zurdas' forearm at the elbow under his armpit and squeezed to hold it there.

Zurdas was drunk, but he was not weak, and McGuire was. At best, all McGuire had done or could do was to confuse the big-boned brute. McGuire, already exhausted when he had leaped, threw away in a flurry of desperation the most of what strength madness had given him.

McGuire was beyond all sensation of pain; he believed this was death and had no more feeling than if mad—he was indeed just that. And Zurdas knew as little of what he himself was doing, knew less, for even his muscular instincts were numbed by drunkenness. Even then he could have strangled McGuire with one hand, but in the less than half minute's struggling his hand did not find McGuire's throat. Zurdas had a wild impulse to kill, kill anyhow he could, and it seemed he could not kill. He was ragefully baffled and the more awkward for his rage.

He tried to shake McGuire off and free the arm pinned under McGuire's armpit. He did sway him clear from the floor to cast him down; but McGuire's foot went behind Zurdas' ankle so that, over-balanced with McGuire's weight against him, he staggered, reeling back, and was falling when his shoulders brought up with a crash against the wall. Thus supported, he still kept on his feet.

With his free arm Zurdas struck a wild swinging blow. His fist passed over McGuire's head—suddenly pulled down and to one side—and came against his own face. Thus baffled, maddened, he drew both arms about McGuire and with jerking squeeze took the breath out of his body; but McGuire bit him as a cat bites, then set his teeth. The pain brought a sort of gurgling yelp from Zurdas.

He swore with thick-tongued mouthing of curses, pawed and pushed to shake off this cat-like devil. He turned with staggering trample of unsteady feet, threw an arm embracingly about McGuire's shoulders and set his teeth in McGuire's neck, squeezing as if to hold him there and devour him. McGuire, with one hand pinned fast against Zurdas' body, groped with the other for Zurdas' face and eyes. So at last Zurdas, who had held to the gun as to a club, found the gun and arm wholly free, and with the impulse to kill, kill anyhow he could, he thrust the gun's muzzle deep against McGuire's back.

McGuire, with a flash of vivid terror, became aware of the steady pressure, like a stab in his back just below the ribs—became aware of what Zurdas meant to do and, tightly held, utterly helpless, he writhed with a convulsive squirming jerk. He could not, whatever his writhing, have escaped the point-blank pressure, but he had slightly changed the way the gun was pointing as the shot was fired.

McGuire felt a soft, gliding, warm but painless sensation pass through his body. There came upon him a mild mystified feeling that "this then is death," and with it a kind of dizzy relaxation and sense of peace. His eyes were clouded with a swirling dark haze, and with fleeting bewilderment he seemed to be resisting a weight that vaguely he wanted to resist—and did, so that instead of falling backward he suddenly seemed to be pulled, and went down face forward in a full-length, toppling fall.

McGuire tried to stir and lift his head, but did not move. He had a confused, dazed wonder at the feeling that Zurdas was near him and tried to put out a hand to feel whether this were so, but the hand remained motionless. All light had gone from the room, so he could not see. Vaguely he felt a warm gushing throb somewhere in his body, but the body

seemed drawing away as if leaving him. There was no pain, there was no fear, only a strange and not unpleasant dizziness as if falling softly into black space. With a kind of drowsy contentment a thought flickered like a match-flame in the midst of darkness—

"She's there—already there—be happy there—"

Then the thought-flame went out, and all was dark with the darkness of death.

III

WHEN McGuire opened his eyes he looked with staring wonder into a smoked-up, scraggle-bearded, cross-eyed face that appeared to be bending near, and it was grinning like a gleeful devil. He shifted his dazed wonder toward the light and saw a big, bearded, most kindly, solemn old devil that he would have thought at once was Old Brade, except that Old Brade's beard was white and this beard and face, the clothes and all, were smoky-black as sooty fumes of the pit could make them.

Pain seemed to eat on McGuire from fingertips down along the whole of his body, and there was a scorching, throbbing ache through his belly as if the devil's pitchfork had reached him in the back.

Old Brade, with one knee on the floor, with motionless, unwearying steadiness held the lamp for the doctor. Dr. Martin, with gleeful excitement, was saying:

"—what you mean trying to die? Don't you dare! I've sweat for half an hour to pull you out of —— by the hair so there'd be somebody to tell us what's been—"

McGuire shut his eyes dizzily and lost the meaning of the words; the sound was a humming mumble. The air seemed full of other voices, far-off voices, and the pound of feet tramping about on the veranda.

Queer, they'd put devils that looked like earth-friends to torture you. Torture not so bad, though, if this the worst—

"Here, Dan! Here, drink this."

McGuire opened his eyes. David, black of face as any demon, was knees-down by his head, with a hand under his head, offering a glass of water.

"This is heaven. You're trying to fool me," McGuire muttered with a grin's twitch at the corners of his mouth.

"Clear off his head," said the doctor.

McGuire rolled his head from one side to the other and looked with puzzlement at thick white wrappings on his forearms and hands.

"What? What's this?"

"Real cow butter and good clean sheeting," said the doctor. "Told you we'd pulled you out of —— by the hair—but you got scorched up a little."

McGuire grinned feebly. Good old perfect devil, the doctor.

"McGuire, we thought the big black fiend had this night moved cook stove and all his crew over to Brade's, but what the double —— happened here? We found that room a wreck. Even the partition sagging out of plumb. We found that girl so —— near dead that if she lives I've sworn to—"

"Reena! She—don't lie to me! She isn't dead?"

"I won't lie. She isn't dead—yet! But—"

"She won't die—" McGuire staringly searched for David's face, and finding it, with wide, fixed gaze he said in assurance, "She won't die, David. She won't die now. No."

And David, a little conscience-hurt that he had ever felt the least bit doubtful of McGuire, avoided the look at first and made a clumsy smoothing pat at the sheet over the mattress on the floor; then he said:

"My God, but I'm glad *you* live—you and Reena are alive. Does it hurt much, Dan? Hurt?"

McGuire, with pained twitch and happy grin mingling in an oddly shaped smile, shut his eyes and mumbled:

"—— no. This is peace."

"See here, McGuire," said the doctor. "I oughtn't let you talk, but I'll make you. Won't hurt, I know, for if death was on your ticket, you'd have bunged

out long ago. Ah, this has been a great night for the Royal Order of Us Who Are Damned!"

The doctor's voice, always so raspingly cynical, was strangely joyous. For the first time in recent years his bitter, shamed heart had recovered a bit of long lost faith in the decency and courage of the human animal. Dogs had such qualities, he would say, but not men. But this night, fire-fighting over at Brade's, he had seen men do daring things and jest lightly in the midst of dangerous work.

It made him think of men he had once been among fire-fighting on a frigate in Chinese waters. Some of those fellows had even banteringly urged one another not to work too hard and so lose their one good chance of heaven by being blown high over the pearly gates. That, and all else that seemed worth-while in his life, had been in the days before the night, at a garden party where lanterns dangled in the moonlight, he had slapped a certain gold-striped personage for—well, for reason enough, since a good woman's name had been tainted. The personage brought charges and lied with calm dignity. The medical hot-head was pitched out headlong.

"Ha, McGuire, we thought we'd been having a hot time of it over at Brade's, then we came over here for the pleasure of taking Zurdas out and—and here we find Zurdas, dead as a mad dog ought to be, shot through the guts by a God-blessed slug that must have gone through you, ricocheted from one of his vertebra or pelvic bones, bounced clear up and nipped his heart. Found you on top of him with a powder-burned hole from back to belly-button—and teeth marks on both of you, like —— Kilkenny cats! And what in —— have you done to wrists and hands? Tried to cook and skin 'em?"

"Where's Reena?"

"In her bed, with a crazy Frenchman keeping watch like a mother in case she stirs, and pretending it's sudden cold makes his eyes run. Blasted hypocrite. Clear crazy, too. He went off his head and tried to kiss you.

"It was Lamont who had fears that something had happened to Reena, and he came at break-neck gallop out to Brade's. I'd been pulled out there to see a woman I knew; knowing her, it was no use to go to see, for when a thoroughbred like that takes poison she takes enough—doesn't do it to make people paw her over and beg her not to die.

"I was just ready to start back a little after sunset when a blaze off to the south told us Zurdas had made good his threat and fired the mill. Then Fanning's house went up. Then the men's quarters. Next, the storehouse. You know how ants move in on you? We thought all —— had done the same on Brade's. Nobody needed two guesses to name Zurdas having sent in the fire-bugs. Then Lamont dashed in among us to ask where Reena was and where was Harris.

"Harris answered 'here' quick enough, but three men had to swear he wasn't a black—he was that smoked up. —— salamander! He went through smoke and sheet of flame with David here and broke through the storehouse back wall to get out powder-kegs and case of dynamite.

"Harris said he'd shortened his stirrups and put her on his horse. He'd stayed to look at the fire. Said fires always charmed him. Give him a charmed life, I'd say! She'd said to him that she would be all right, said you'd sent for her, said she had to go—and did. Lamont said she'd never reached town, and he jolly well thought Zurdas had got her.

"We all already had on a dab of war paint, as you see." The doctor poked a finger at his own blackened face. "We came storming in here on horseback—Some horses carrying double. Lamont had told us you were locked up in the Benz icehouse with Pealo, and here we found—found—why you, McGuire, you burned the lashings off your wrist over a lamp and jumped that big brute with bare hands!"

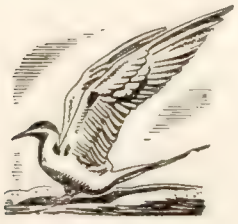
And this ex-medical officer, thrown out of the service as unworthy to associate

with gallant men, felt his throat so tightly contract that he swore gulpingly to clear away the choking sensation.

"But Reena—I thought her dead, Doctor.' She never moved!"

"The shock of a slug through the breast—it does that. Usually they are dead, too. As a physician, I've done the best I can by promising to quit poker and turn missionary if only— Oh, it's too good a joke on the devil for the Lord to let her die! Zurdas said she was Symonds' daughter; we all know he lied. But he said it and honest men will swear that he did.

"So it's all hers—everything! Who else to claim it? There'll be no woman below the Line that's half as rich!—ah boy, does it hurt like that? And here I've been fiddling with this opium pill. Open your mouth. That's it. Now the water, Dave. There you are. Shut your eyes. You'll be easy in a minute. You'll be all right. If we'd come ten minutes sooner tonight— Why Zurdas' body was still so warm I thought him alive. Got out arsenic powders by way of restorative. Too bad he didn't need 'em. I too would've like to do something this night to make me right with God."



THE END

Clink of Gold in Rag-

By HUGH

CHAPTER I

THE INTERRUPTED GUEST

THE SUN, sliced in half by the timbered skyline, made a torch of the fine-spun red hair of Columbia Jefferson as she joined her brother down the creek path. He knew what was on her mind, and why she had followed him. He, too, was troubled by the problem but, being a man and her brother, he impatiently began:

"More secret talk, Columby? Hants is one of us. We don't have to be sly."

With a little gesture of despair she answered:

"Wash, I'm plumb discouraged. Pap stays away so much and has so little to tell us."

It was no new worry, no new topic between them. Washington Jefferson deposited the buckets of water on the ground and essayed to ease her mind by remarking—

"Most likely he's off buying more hosses."

"But we have twenty at pasture now."

"Good property. If the Mormons quit Nauvoo pap will sell them every hoss he can scare up at a fancy price."

She had followed him to be comforted, as she had many times before. As usual it was difficult for her secret fears to give way before his plausible reasoning. With eyes like his, black and steady as an Indian's, she stared searchingly into his thin, dark face, and demanded—

"Wash, is pap a jack-Mormon?"

He shook his head and told her:

"I don't believe he'd be welcome across the river in Nauvoo. He works through some one, prob'ly—one of those whittling deacons who stands strong in Nauvoo and has a big itch for extry profits. Pap's a master-hand at hunting bargains in hoss-flesh."

His sister was not ready to accept this explanation. She reminded him:

"A whittling deacon's job is to whittle sticks in the face of a man not wanted in Nauvoo. There's a band of them that do that. Would one dare to make secret profits by having truck with a Gentile?"

"Good land, Columby, but how you do crowd a body! I've been run out of Nauvoo by their derned knives sending splinters and shavings into my face, and had my ears filled by their shrill whistling, but there's always some in the crowd who'd be glad to play my partner and grab a quick profit. I've done my hunk about worrying over pap. He seems contented enough when he comes home."

"He's been away longer'n usual, Wash.

Town

PENDEXTER

I can't help feeling he's bound to get into trouble over this trading and buying hosses."

"Now we're trying to scare ourselves," he told her. "He has a proper bill of sale for every hoss he fetches home. The critters are out in the grass opening for any one to see. They're honest come by. Quit your fretting. Pap's master-slick at a trade, and he's old enough to take care of hisself."

These talks always helped the girl for the time being, but never uprooted fear from her heart.

Lee County, Iowa, was not the only stretch along the Mississippi overshadowed by lawlessness. The Jefferson cabin was less than ten miles from Montrose, and across from the latter town stood Nauvoo, the miracle city, already boasting of a population second to none in all Illinois. River-pirates, murderers, coiners and other brands of villains infested much of the country from above Dubuque down to far away Louisiana.

The whole country was seething with excitement over the Oregon lands and the common belief that the Mormon hive was about to swarm and penetrate the far West in search of a new home. Eastern ne'er-do-wells had flocked to the river and these, with the native-born desperadoes, were in the hey-day of criminal activities. Now that Joseph Smith the prophet was dead at the hands of a mob, the Lions of the Lord had announced a wholesale withdrawal to the West, and the exodus was expected to begin before snow fell.

It was a time of unrest and horrible crimes and frightened cabins. Whole families had been exterminated and an unsuccessful attempt made to place the blame on the Mormons. It was a continuation of the days of Murel the land-pirate, of Mason-of-the-Woods, and other monsters. It had its beginning with the Harpes, long before Smith established a new religion. Like a terrible sore it would work itself clean, but that day seemed far off as Washington Jefferson picked up his buckets and reminded his sister:

"No one can trace a stolen hoss to pap. I feel meeching in saying it. Sounds like I was defending him, and him not needing any defense. He's slick, but he's always inside the law."

"He never takes you with him."

"Because I'm needed here, red-head. Times too dangerous for a woman to be left alone."

"Hants could guard the cabin."

" 'Missouri' Hants to be depended on? Why, Columby, you know he'd quit everything and anything if he took a

notion to go hunting. You trying to argue that pap's outside the law, Columby?"

"God forbid I ever should have to think that, Wash! But I am so beset with fears. I wish we could get off this crick. I'd like to move west 'way across to the Missouri River. Sometimes I get the notion the Hawkeyes will do pap mischief."

Jefferson groaned beneath his breath and muttered:

"Whittling deacons in Nauvoo. Imitation of them on our side the river. And Hawkeyes calling at cabins in the night and taking the law into their own hands. I don't like it any more than you do, Columby. If the Hawkeyes think a man ain't sound, or if any of them have a grudge against him, he's likely to be found stretched in the Half-breed Tract. Same as they did with the Hodges."

"The Hodges were bloody beasts. They murdered," she whispered, her dark eyes dilating at mention of the two brothers.

"If they stretched an innercent man, then he'd be served as they served the Hodges," he insisted. "Oh, Columby, it gets on my nerves whenever I let myself think about it. I'd do anything to get him away."

She seized his arm with both hands and hoarsely whispered:

"Then get him away. We'll start at night, travel west. Travel hard and fast and keep going till we get outside the shadder that hangs over us like a black blanket even when it's sunshine."

"I've hankered to have him quit these parts, but—"

"No 'buts' about it, Wash. The next time pap comes home put him into a cart—tie him if we have to—and go!"

Jefferson stared down in admiration at the top of her fiery head, then nodded in fierce approval.

"We'll do that," he said. "You've got the little mother's spunk. But we've acted like little children too long. We'll sit in the driver's seat. We'll snake pap so far he'll never think of beating back. Hants is always keen to be moving. Hants don't help pap any when he lets on he thinks pap's mighty smart to come home with his pockets filled with hard money or half a dozen good hosses."

"He don't know much, except hunting," she agreed. "But he's loyal to us. He ain't scared of nothing. He allows his wife pestered him most mortal, but she's his wife and he oughter go back to her. Maybe he would if we'd say we'd take the two of them west with us. I'd like to go to that Oregon country."

"Aye. The Oregon country. What new sights and wonders we'd see!"

He looked very boyish as he turned and stared to the west, his lips parted, his eyes shining.

"We've talked big," she said, "but will we do it? Will we put him in a cart and start in the morning if he comes home tonight?"

"We won't wait till morning," he replied fiercely. "We'll be traveling inside an hour after he's had his supper. We've got carts and hosses, and mighty little to move. By gawdfry! I'm through with sticking around here to be scared stiff every day, fearing that the Hawkeyes or Sheriff Taylor may come riding down the brushroad to nab pap. We won't talk any before Hants yet. And don't you fret your pretty head any more."

Her eyes widened and she gasped—

"Why, Washington Jefferson!" She halted him by standing in front of him. "What sort of foolishness you talking? Me—pretty!"

He was annoyed at having slipped into a compliment. Frowning down into her undeniably pretty face, he roughly said—

"Oh, you look well enough."

She wheeled and faced up the cabin path. No one had ever told her she was pretty. Her brother feared she was disappointed. He recklessly added:

"You're—pretty, Columby. Too pretty for this oncivilized country. Now shut up!"

She ran swiftly ahead of him and darted into the cabin. Missouri Hants, named after the State he had fled from, was

soundly sleeping on the floor in the midst of big dogs. The girl hopped over him to stand before a small mirror and scrutinize her reflection. Some visitors had eyed her amorously, to her annoyance and resentment. Her brother's tribute gave her a thrill and reddened her cheek. She feared she should feel ashamed of this new emotion. When her brother entered and kicked the dogs out of his path and set the buckets on the table, she cried—

"Why, Wash, what a fine, upstanding looking young man you be!"

He stared in amazement; then savagely demanded—

"Gunning to have me bust you one, you little red-headed brat?"

She danced away and placed the table between them and shrilly chanted:

"A fine, upstanding young man. My brother's a handsome young man."

"Columby, you keep shut. Want Hants to hear it and think we're two fools?"

Her small face became very sober, although she tried to smile. With unconscious pathos she explained—

"Just trying to make believe we're happy, Wash."

He felt sorry for her and showed it by scowling, and muttering—

"We will be happy."

Then he kicked Hants' booted feet and brought him scrambling into complete wakefulness and motioned for him to step outside. While the girl used the home-made broom the two men lounged on the grass and watched the dusk come through the white maples and ash.

Hants yawned and mumbled—

"Pap be back soon, you reckon?"

"Reckon so. Have a notion to move across to the Missouri shore."

"Always honed to see that country. 'Round these parts is gitting too murdersome," said Hants. "If river-pirates don't cut your throat there's the Hawkeyes to hang you without stopping to look into your case. Then again, Wash, any one can come along and fill us full of lead and cross to Nauvoo and play up they hanker to be Mormons, and they'll be swore free by witnesses who'd vow they hadn't been out of Nauvoo for a dog's age. Sort of a Godsend to be onery and poor in this stretch of the country. If a Hawkeye kills you by mistake, or on purpose to square off a grudge, he can git clear by saying he 'lowed you was a lawbreaker."

"Mebbe. But lawbreakers aren't always sworn clear of the noose," reminded Jefferson. "I heard the Hodges laffing and joking in the Montrose jail, prime sure they'd be sworn clear. But they knew the jig was up when their brother was found dead in Nauvoo, with his throat cut."

"That's 'cause Nauvoo was tired of them. But if these Hawkeyes want to be ahead of the sheriff in catching outlaws, why don't they bust open that dratted Rag-Town?"

"Mebbe they don't know just where Rag-Town is."

"If you travel a bit northwest of here you'd find it inside of twenty or thirty miles."

"That gives ten miles leeway for missing it. Rag-Town, I've heard tell, is a name for quite a big stretch of rough country."

"I dunno. But the river believes Smith City, due north of here, is at the east end of the stretch."

They smoked their pipes in silence for some minutes and watched the darkness take possession of the mixed growth. Then Jefferson in a low voice told his companion:

"We're always living in a shadder that's blacker than this night. Hants, I'm thinking the time's coming when guns will talk along the trace to that pesky Rag-Town."

From the doorway the girl called—

"Eat now, or wait on the chance of pap's coming?"

"We'll eat now and eat again when pap comes," her brother replied.

"You mean, Wash, you don't have any notion he'll come tonight?"

"Good land! What a child to put words in a body's mouth! I mean I'm that keen

for victuals I can eat two suppers in one evening."

"And I can eat every half hour all the time, Columby," added Hants.

Now that the night was besieging the cabin it was characteristic of the times that the cabin door should be closed and barred while the three ate and talked hogs and crops. Columbia, having in mind their possible migration, insisted they had too many hens and suggested the flock be reduced by selling in the Montrose markets. Hants was still brooding over the Hawkeyes, a border vigilance committee ostensibly organized to punish those who were beyond a sheriff's warrant. He handled the topic volubly until the girl interrupted him to complain that rough-and-ready justice often resulted in too close proximity of execution to sentence. She insisted this haste to punish prevented any possible correction of an error in judgment. Jefferson gloomily declared the Hawkeyes included those who hunted with the hounds and ran with the hares, that the attitude of the organization was "too brash" toward honest strangers, and that private grudges were settled under cover of quick justice.

Their talk was typical of the times. There was nothing of good cheer and beauty; only a fear of the night, of the sound of galloping hoofs, of the clamorous alarm suddenly raised by the dogs. When the meal was finished the girl set about the house-work while the men talked in low tones. The general attitude was that of listening. It was reflected in the girl when she was free to sit down and mend her brother's rough clothes. She endeavored to follow the men's conversation while one ear was turned to catch outdoor sounds. The men were similarly alert. Hants would interrupt a sentence to give heed to the dogs crowding against the barred door and, deciding all was well thus far, he would finish his statement.

The girl leaned forward, put the garment aside and was about to make some observation when the dogs voiced ferocious interrogations and rushed into the trace. Their cries filled the cabin with anxiety. Such an alarm implied terrible disaster. The girl reacted by extinguishing the candle; Hants and Jefferson by catching up their rifles and kneeling at loopholes on each side of the door.

The girl was the first to speak. She shrilly whispered—

"It ain't pap, Wash."

"You know the dogs never bark at pap, Columby," mumbled her brother. "What you make out, Hants?"

The chorus was being disrupted into staccato challenges. Hants, with an ear at the loophole, reported—

"Hoss or hosses coming—mebbe Hawkeyes."

"I'm plumb discouraged," wearily complained the girl. "Pestered by those who hide in Nauvoo, mistook for being jack-Mormons—and now the Hawkeyes!"

"Hush!" cautioned Hants, again listening to diagnose the dwindling querulousness of the dogs. "Not Hawkeyes. Wait a jiffy— That's danged queer, Wash. Them bear-dogs seem to be gentling down as if meeting a friendly— Hark! Hear him? Old Gall-Buster's doing the talking for the four. Growling out questions like a St. Louis lawyer. Dad burn! If he ain't decided to make friends!"

"He'd never act up like that if there was a parcel of them," muttered Jefferson. "Knowingest dog we ever had."

"They must be coming up the path very slow," whispered the girl. "Why don't they give us a hoot if they're honest?"

"Keep still," said Hants, his ear classifying the sounds while his cunning mind extracted the truth. He heard the snuffling, amiable sounds of the dogs and the murmur of a human voice and the tread of a horse.

"I've got it!" he softly exclaimed in triumph. "One man walking 'n' leading his hoss. Critter must be lame or tuckered out. I'll flock out and take a bite out of his ear if he ain't sound."

"Don't be a bigger fool than you was born," said Jefferson.

"Jest one man," stoutly insisted Hants. "Bet my rifle-gun ag'n your corn-cob!

Mebbe some Hawkeye fetching orders to us from the band."

"We're law-abiding folks," angrily said the girl.

"Quiet! Hants is right. One man—leading a hoss."

Now the voice of the man as he talked low and soothingly to the dogs was audible to the three in the cabin.

"I'm giving him a hoot," whispered Jefferson.

"Wait! Might be a trick. Others maybe waiting for him to get the door open," cried Columbia.

"I know our dogs, young woman. No parcel of men can fool them."

With that Jefferson rose and softly lifted the bar, opened the door a crack and demanded sharply:

"Who be you out there? What do you want? Speak quick—you're covered by two guns."

A genial voice promptly answered:

"I'm Enoch Porter. Seeking shelter. My horse went dead lame ten miles back. I can pay with hard money."

"What's your business?"

"Just quit Spencer Stokes' show-boat. Think to try buying horses."

"Where you hail from?"

"From Montrose last. Crossed to Nauvoo from Montrose and back again."

"We don't have no truck with Nauvoo."

"I was there just long enough to have men with long knives whittle sticks in my face."

"The whittling deacons*," murmured Hants.

"Be you a jack-Mormon?" continued Jefferson.

"Don't just know what you mean. I'm an Easterner. I'm no Mormon."

"He means a Gentile who has much truck with the Mormons," shrilly cried the girl.

"Good evening, miss. I quit the Stokes show at Keokuk, went to Montrose, crossed to Nauvoo, recrossed and here I am. I left the show thinking to dicker in horses after hearing talk about the Mormons leaving this part of the country. Didn't realize how upset this stretch of the river is. I've been turned away with threats at every place I've called. I'm tired and hungry and can pay my way. If my horse wasn't dead lame I'd push on to the next house."

"Never mind the next house. You'll find them mighty scurce west of this one," said Jefferson. "You'll be asked a heap of questions wherever you stop and give a hoot."

"Several houses have threatened to shoot me," admitted the stranger. "I'll answer any question you put."

"If you're honest you're welcome to shelter and food without pay. What made you, a stranger, think you could pick up hosses out this way?" suspiciously demanded Jefferson.

"When I landed at Keokuk I saw enough of the place to believe horses could be found in plenty if a man was able to pay cash. And I carry enough money to make a good start."

"Keokuk? Where'n —— you reckon you be, mister?" broke in Hants.

"I should be on the outskirts of Keokuk— Down, pup— What kind of a country is this, anyway? Every house I've called at has treated me as if I was a robber."

"This is a mighty suspicious country, with some mighty mean, thieving, murdering he-critters bedeviling it, mister," replied Jefferson gravely. "And if you was as free to talk about your money at other places it's a wonder you fetched this far. 'Nother wonder is that a grown-up man could get off the Keokuk road and wander this far west."

"You're eight miles from the Keokuk-Montrose road," cried the girl.

"Good land!" The exclamation was low, but perfectly audible.

"You must be a prime lummox not to know the difference 'tween a rough trace and the main road," contributed Hants.

"It's mighty poor hearing to learn I've gone out of my way."

"We have to be careful how we open our doors at night," explained Jefferson.

*Joseph Smith is credited with organizing this band.

"Since Miller 'n' Liecy was murdered in this county we're mortal fussy. The Hodges swung for that killing, but there's plenty more the same sort left."

"Oh, be careful how you talk, Wash!" begged the girl.

"I'd say the same, and more, if I knew the whole tribe of murderers was out there listening."

"And I'm glad to hear you say it, sir," cried the stranger. "I'm carrying quite a bit of gold and don't want to blunder into rough company. What gives me confidence to say this is the voice of the young woman."

"I reckon he's sound, Wash," whispered Columbia.

"Well, he seems to be alone, Hants. Light the candle, Columby, and set it on the table. Hants, take your place. Mister Porter, walk slow to the door and come in, but have your hands up in front of you."

"I'll sun his moccasins quicker'n you can say scat if he don't look sound," loudly promised Hants as he slipped behind a barrel and trained his long rifle on the door.

The traveler did not relish this rhetorical gesture. In turn he became cautious. He called out:

"Just a minute, I've told my name and business. Who are you folks? Let the young lady do the talking."

"We're the Jeffersons—honest folks," she replied shrilly. "You march in when my brother gives the word. If you're all right you'll be mighty welcome."

"If you're wrong I'll mess up your in-'ards something tremenjous," growled Hants.

"Close your mouth, Hants," commanded Jefferson. "All right, stranger. Come along. Hands in front of you."

The candle, relighted at the fireplace, was now illuminating the long room. The door slowly swung open, shielding Jefferson, who had shifted from rifle to a long pistol. The girl was crouching on the floor behind the table.

The traveler slowly came over the threshold, his two hands holding a carpet-bag in front of him. His quick side-glances discovered a rifle across a barrel, covering him. Back of the rifle was a shock of hair and a glittering eye. On his left was a hand and a pistol and half a face showing from behind the door. The traveler was a likable looking young man, more fastidiously attired than any Iowan the Jeffersons had seen. The trousers of a gaily checked pattern, were tucked into the tops of soft, lustrous boots. The somber tone of the long black coat was relieved by a gray velvet collar. The snowy linen was afire with a large brilliant in the bosom. A new "stovepipe" rested at a rakish angle on the dark curly hair.

The man advanced to the table and told the concealed occupants:

"This bag is heavy. Kindly search me and let me put it down."

He was startled, and exclaimed aloud, as the girl suddenly rose from under the table. "Red fires!" he murmured as he stared down into the steady dark eyes and wondered at the glory of her hair. She caught the involuntary tribute, and in turn was a bit awed by the splendor of his appearance. Her brown cheeks flushed; but her hands were steady as she quickly passed them over his person. She reported:

"Nary gun or knife, Wash. Put up that gun, Hants. Mister Porter, you put that gay bag down and take a stool and lay aside that slick hat and feel to home. I'm Columbia Jefferson. The man back of the door is Washington Jefferson, my brother. Missouri Hants is behind the bar'el. Out here we're all named after States or big men. Pap's away or he'd be glad to welcome you. Where do you hail from?"

Porter seated himself, removed his hat with a sigh of relief and explained:

"New Jersey born, Miss Columbia. Come west to travel with the Stokes show."

The girl's eyes were round in admiration of the wonderful silk handkerchief he was now dabbing at his moist forehead. Like many another pioneer woman she was starving for the beautiful. The square of silk, so carelessly employed,

opened a door in her mind and permitted her to picture the East as a room filled with pretty treasures.

The two men came forward and gravely shook hands. Porter wearily complained:

"Such a country! Every time I found a light I was warned off with threats of a bullet. Began to think I must sleep outdoors. You see, Miss Columbia, I've done all my traveling and living on the show-boat and didn't realize how stirred up the country is."

She was pleased with him. Her small face was piquant as she said:

"It's everyday life for us, mister. We'd feel queer if we lived where everything's quiet and pleasant."

Hants caressed the velvet collar and tried the texture of the coat between thumb and finger.

"Mighty few gamblers on the St. Looy-N'Orleans packets can hold a candle to you, mister, when it comes to best bib 'n' tucker."

Porter did not hear this praise. He was too absorbed in his inventory of the girl. The flaming hair, the steady gaze that seemed to look through him, the self-possession that made her obvious rusticity something which was most desirable, surprized and delighted him. She, too, was frankly curious in studying a new species of man. Dimples increased the liveliness of her expression as she said—

"You really reckoned you was making for Keokuk."

"The darkness let me go astray, Miss Columbia. If I'd been walking I'd noticed the difference. I've lived on a boat and never had any experience with your roads."

There was no denying she was quaintly pretty and very genuine. She revealed the male quality of directness when she insisted—

"But you must be an awful greeny not to know by the way your hoss traveled that you was off the main road."

"Didn't you know enough to look at the stars and see which way was north so's you could go t'other way to find Keokuk?" asked Hants.

"I confess I am simple. I didn't know I was lost. I was too busy waiting for the horse to stumble into holes to do any star-gazing."

Jefferson swung in front of Hants and said:

"We've scouted each other, Porter. We find each other is honest. Now we can be neighborly. Columby, put a streak of fat and lean and some eggs on the fire. Porter, I'm called Wash for short. Hants here ain't much to look at, but he's a rare hellion in a fracas. Only thing he's scared of is his woman down Clark County, Missouri."

Porter's blue eyes twinkled with amusement as he gazed on the hairy visage and found that the small, beady eyes, so sharply studying him, were like those of a wild animal peering from deep cover. Jefferson's words brought uneasiness to Hants. He muttered:

"I *know* the little woman. If I keep my health I'll keep two or three counties ahead of her." To reassert his manhood, perhaps, he added, "If you hadn't been sound, Porter, I'd seen the color of your blood 'fore you could cough."

"I'm very glad to be sound, Mr. Hants."

"Your way with the dogs bothered me," said Jefferson. "Come near reckoning you was some one who'd made friends with them so's you could take us by surprize."

"Always loved dogs. They seem to understand me. That Nauvoo is a big town—bigger than Chicago."

"But you didn't like their whittling deacons," prompted the girl as she kneeled at the fire and tended the big skillet of bacon.

"Not a bit, Miss Columbia. They surrounded me, whistling shrilly and filling my face with shavings, the knives coming closer and closer, until I explained I was there to talk with Brigham Young. Then they let me alone. Young wouldn't say anything about moving west, but he did say they were in the market for horses."

"They say there are whittling deacons

outside of Nauvoo; that they ain't as polite even as the Nauvoo whittlers are," remarked the girl.

"You can't know that, Columby," her brother said sharply.

For the first time, perhaps, she deeply resented her brother's tone and words. She felt he was wrong in correcting her in the presence of a stranger. So she insisted—

"I've heard it said that at Smith City any stranger trying to get into the back country—a wild stretch called Rag-Town—would be turned back mighty quick by the whittlers."

"What 'some one' says usually 'mounts to shucks, nothing else," interrupted her brother. "The least an honest body talks about Smith City and Rag-Town the safer will be their cabin roof."

"Of course I know nothing about the country back from the river," mused Porter.

"If your show had gone far from the river some band of scamps would 'a' stole it," said Columbia.

"Some of the river-towns are a bit rough," assured Porter. "Rag-Town—that's a funny name."

"It's said to be a funny place, Porter," grimly said Jefferson. "And one we don't talk about. Hants, the jug."

The jug was brought to the table and Hants proudly explained:

"It's blue ruin, mister. One snort will make a sick sheep lick a b'ar."

Porter declined the courtesy and explained that his work with the Stokes show had demanded iron nerves, that abstinence had gotten him out of the habit. Jefferson tossed off a cup of the fiery liquor and inquired—

"Just what did you do in that show?"

"Fancy shooting with revolvers."

He reached for his carpet-bag, opened it and had two Walker guns, forty-four caliber, half drawn out when a rim of cold metal against the back of his neck turned him to stone. The girl fiercely cried—

"You, Hants, drop that rifle!"

Her brother lacked her trustfulness, and the possibility of a new ruse flashed through his head. Revolvers in a carpet-bag might permit a bandit to take a household by surprize. He snatched the guns from Porter's limp hands and quickly examined them.

"Both empty," he told Hants. Then to Porter as he restored the guns. "You oughter let on what you was up to."

"It would have been better," agreed Porter as he rubbed the back of his neck. "Really, Miss Columbia, I'm quite clever with those guns. That is, people who pay to see me shoot seem to think so. I snuff candles, shoot cigars from a man's mouth, shoot over my shoulder by using a mirror, and the like. Well, folks, that's about all there is for me to tell. I quit the show to make money selling horses. Now Easterners are just as curious as any Westerners. I'd like to be told things."

"We ain't very interesting folks," said Jefferson. "We try to make crops and lay away some corn. In the fall we shoot our venison and dry it, and salt our pork and cure our bacon. It would be a dull life for a man from the big Eastern cities."

"Yet you have some excitement, if you have to stand off every newcomer with a gun. From river-talk, you must have some lawless men in these parts."

"We beat all creation for hoss-thieves, river-pirates, coiners and murderers," proudly boasted Hants. "All kinds of rascals thicker'n spatter all up and down the river, on both sides, in the woods and on the islands. Just now one of the tough spots is Rag-Town. Smith City is called the 'Gateway' to it."

"Hold up, Hants!" harshly broke in Jefferson. "You paint it too dodburned thick. What he means, Porter, is that a dozen of lawless critters can p'izen the good name of a whole State."

"Oh, we can match you, scoundrel for scoundrel, in any of our Eastern cities," lightly assured Porter. "Just you four live here when Mr. Jefferson is at home?"

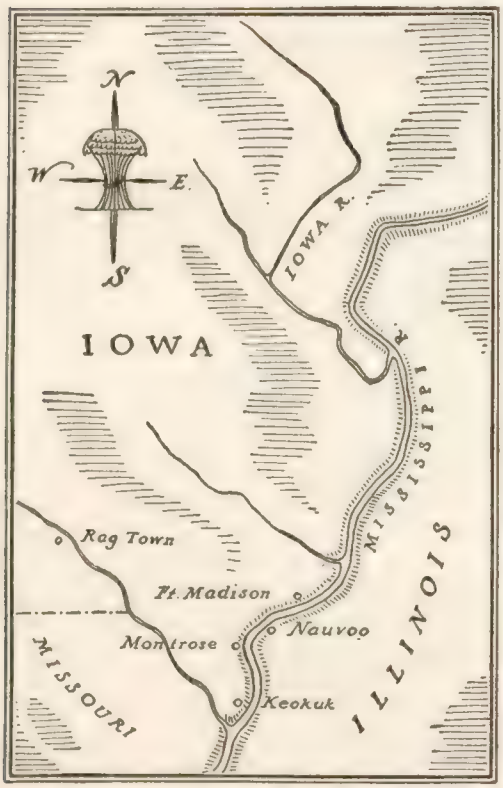
"That's the whole outfit," said Jefferson. "Pap'll be home any time now."

"We was hoping he'd come tonight," added the girl.

"And of course you're worried a bit when he's away in these troublesome times," gravely remarked Porter.

"Whatever give you that fool notion?" And Jefferson's brows came down in a savage scowl. "Pap's mighty good natured, but he can take care of hisself."

"As smart a man in a rinkus as ever



you see! A whole team of b'ar-dogs and a smart rifle-gun thrown in—"

"That'll do, Hants," said Jefferson.

Porter affably explained—

"This country is so queer to me, an Eastern man, that what might sorely trouble me would be just ordinary, every-day life to you people."

"Yes, we must seem queer to you," gravely conceded the girl. "But supper's on the table." The big platter, heaped high with bacon and eggs, was flanked with plates of bread and decorated by a large dish of preserved wild plums. "Draw up, Mister Porter, and hoe in. It ain't much, but the best we can get, and there's plenty more, such as it is."

"And good enough for the fussiest person on earth," hungrily declared Porter.

While they were eating Porter entertained them with some of his experience while with the Stokes show. In return Jefferson dwelt on the facts and fallacies of the Mormon city of Nauvoo. He endeavored to make clear how public sentiment warmly welcomed the coming of the new faith, and had turned against it because of political and economic developments and not because of lawlessness. In this connection he insisted:

"Take the river from Burlington to N'Orleans and you won't find a more law-abiding town than Nauvoo. But the property of Gentiles, when alongside a Mormon settlement, ain't worth shucks to the owner. No Gentile will buy it and Mormons will take it only at their own price. Turn it 'round and the Gentiles would do the same thing. Buy's cheap as they can. Another big reason for folks not liking 'em is the way they vote in a solid block. Joe Smith used to cast three thousand votes as one. They filled the county offices and named the men to go to Congress. If Smith hadn't been killed he would named the Governor of Illinois.

"Not matter how the vote was thrown, the Whigs or the Democrats would be powerful mad. So one of the two parties was mad all the time. Missouri was sore as a pup when she wanted to arrest Smith and couldn't. For no sheriff can arrest a man in Nauvoo unless the warrant is sworn out in that town. The people got het up when the Nauvoo common council fixed it so the governor couldn't pardon any one convicted in Nauvoo. And yet, aside from the whittling deacons driving away people that ain't wanted there, there's no crimes in Nauvoo like what we have in lots of other places."

"That's very interesting. Any of your Gentile rascals have anything to do with Nauvoo?"

"They go there and make believe to be Mormons so the sheriff can't take 'em away," Hants answered eagerly. "Most peaceful town in the West and having some of the worst sort of men living there. Men in Rag-Town can hide up there when things git hot for them."

"Oh, come, come. You don't know that is a fact," protested Jefferson. "You understand this, Porter: It ain't healthy for us people out here to make much talk about Rag-Town."

"While you're perfectly safe in saying anything to me, I remember I am a stranger. I get your point of view," said Porter. "But as to Nauvoo, it sounds if a foreign government came near being set up inside the United States."

"That's what it was coming to," readily agreed Jefferson. "Smith was trying mortal hard to have Nauvoo and the surrounding country set off as a new territory. Well, he's dead—murdered by a mob—and there's a mighty unrest in Nauvoo. We keep hearing the whole outfit will quit the city and cross to this side and keep moving till they find a new home. Leave that big place, temple and everything."

"I heard the same up and down the river. Heard so much I thought one might make a big profit selling them horses," said Porter. "But for a home I think I would prefer the East. Until you settle down out here, at least."

"The East!" sneered Hants. "Where folks are so fussy they have to have boards to walk on when they go outdoors. Gawdfry mighty! An', houses crowded together till you scarce have room to spit! What if you hanker for honey? Where's your bee-tree? If you itch for b'ar meat where's your b'ar-rough*? If you don't like your nearest neighbor can you take an ax, auger, handsaw, butcher-knife and gun and bust loose into new country and make a new home? Not by a —— sight! If you're took with dumb-ague and need some walnut-bark pills most mortal, can you step out and git the bark and—"

The sudden baying of the dogs interrupted the rest of the diatribe. A voice called loudly:

"Whoa! Whoa!"

As if the scene had been rehearsed, with the dogs giving the cue, Jefferson and Hants seized their rifles and sprang to the loopholes even as the girl was extinguishing the candle and quietly warning—

"Drop flat on the floor, mister!"

"What is it?" he whispered as he slid to the floor beside her.

"Men on hosses."

"Means trouble?"

"We always start figgering it that way."

"I'll load my guns."

"If he moves to touch a gun, let me know, Columby!" commanded Jefferson.

"I've got the bag. He won't touch them."

"Why, Miss Columby, what can you be thinking I am?" whispered Porter.

"Haven't made up my mind yet. You come, then men on hosses come."

She stopped abruptly as a deep voice outside called:

"In the house, there! Call off these —— dogs before I shoot 'em. This is Hawkins Taylor, deputy-sheriff, speaking."

Hants whistled shrilly and the dogs came bounding against the closed door. Jefferson asked—

"Who's with you, Taylor?"

"No one. Keep the dogs off. I'm going to light."

"What you want out here at this lawful house?"

"I want a man I believe you have in there, and I want him right smart."

"Oh, mister!" Columbia cried softly.

Taylor further explained:

"I've trailed him here from Montrose. He called at several places. Calls himself Porter."

"That's my name—Enoch Porter," loudly announced the guest, and he came to his feet, found and pressed the girl's hand for a second and then walked to the door. "If you're a law officer I'll come out."

"He's alone," whispered Hants.

*Canebrake.

"Wash Jefferson knows my voice. He'll tell you I'm an officer," said the deputy.

"That's right," said Jefferson. "But I don't like this way of yanking a man from my house. Make a light, Columby."

"I don't mind talking with all the law officers between here and Christmas," said Porter. "I'm coming out—unarmed."

And he threw wide the door and pushed the dogs aside and walked down the lane of candlelight to where Taylor was standing. Those in the cabin listened anxiously, but could not catch what Taylor was saying. Porter spoke briefly, as if answering questions.

Soon Porter was announcing:

"I must go back with Taylor. We're coming in for a bit."

The girl softly lamented:

"The law wants him. The law wants him. The law takes him."

"Keep your fool mouth shut, Columby," muttered Jefferson. "Howdy, Taylor. Hants, git the jug. Porter's a stranger to us. Hope he ain't in trouble."

"He's a stranger to me," replied the deputy-sheriff. "If he's in trouble it's of his own making. About four fingers, Hants."

Porter stood close by the table, the officer behind him. Porter glanced at the girl, then shifted his gaze. She told the officer anxiously:

"He was in a river-show, Sheriff. He can't have done wrong."

"Young woman, a show-boat's a prime place for a man to hide in who wants to peddle bogus money along the river," remarked the deputy after he had bolted his drink.

The girl stared helplessly into the stern face. The officer quietly continued:

"And there's a little case of murder I'm looking into. Man found dead beside the road near Montrose. He must a been killed about the time this young feller came by that way. Now you have the whole story. Fetch out his hoss, Jefferson."

"His hoss is played out," explained the girl. "He thought he was on the Keokuk road."

Taylor laughed without making a sound. Then he told her:

"You're not green enough to believe any yarn like that? That he couldn't know the difference between a road and a trace, between south and west?"

"I—I did believe him," she muttered.

"Thanks, Miss Columbia. And just remember nothing is proved against me yet," said Porter.

"Hants, fetch out a fresh nag," directed Jefferson. "Taylor, what did the dead man look like?" The girl's hands were fiercely clinched and she seemed to be holding her breath.

"Not your pap, Jefferson," said Taylor. "A stranger. Clean shaved. Well dressed without being finnified. Went by the name of Stacy, according to some papers in his clothes."

While the girl was drawing a deep breath of relief Porter demanded—

"How can you hitch me up with any dead man?"

"You was on the spot. You had the chance. You may have known what I know—that he had a considerable sum in gold on his person. Or if you've been passing bad money and this man was your partner, you two might have met there to divide profits. You might wanted to take all. But we're talking too much. Is that carpet-bag his property?"

The girl nodded. Keeping behind Porter, Taylor directed her to pass the bag to him. He added—

"Chances are slim he'll ever come back for it."

The girl did not offer to touch the bag. Jefferson tossed it on the table. The contents clinked loudly. Taylor pushed Porter aside and with one hand on a gun he opened the bag and allowed part of the contents to spill out on the table. The Jeffersons and Hants exclaimed aloud as gold coins streamed after the two revolvers.

"Only a part of it," said Taylor tersely. "Quite a heap of money in that bag. He may have come by the guns honestly,

but the dead man had considerable money in gold when he was leaving Montrose."

Porter's face was pale as the sheriff gave him the bag to carry and pushed him through the doorway. His voice was hoarse as he called over his shoulder:

"Miss Columbia, I'll come back for my horse. They can't fasten any crime on me."

"Don't come back till sent for," grimly ordered Jefferson. "Your hoss will be left for you in Montrose when I come to git mine."

With a hand clamped on the prisoner's shoulder, Taylor whimsically told the Jeffersons:

"Really doing this feller a good turn. If the Hawkeyes had got him first he'd be looking down from a maple tree with never a chance to explain."

"You believe he's guilty?" faintly asked the girl.

"Guilty as ——, miss, but he'll get a square deal."

After officer and prisoner rode away in the darkness the girl dropped on a stool at the table and rested her head on her arms and moaned:

"God help us! Another terrible crime. Will we never live in peace?"

Her brother ran his tongue over his dry lips and muttered:

"Pap—why don't he come? He carries a goodish bit of money with him at times."

CHAPTER II

THE GATEWAY

SMITH CITY consisted of a dozen log cabins strung along a rough trace which led to Fort Madison at the head of the Lower Rapids some fifteen miles distant. Throughout the backwoods country along the great river were similar collections of rude houses, many of which were pridefully designated as cities. Unlike the majority of such humble communities, however, Smith City was held in ill-repute because of the belief its denizens served as spies and go-betweens for the rough men frequently and furiously galloping through the settlement to hide in the rough and partly timbered country beyond.

In truth, should a stranger attempt to settle in Smith City, he would find existence intolerable until he was properly vouched for. The citizens were more exacting and critical of newcomers here than citizens in exclusive residential sections of a large city. Nor did civic pride encourage expansion. Among officers of the law, as well as by the fugitives they endeavored to run down, Smith City was often called the Gateway. The sallow, furtive creatures who lived there, without indulging in the hard toil usually imposed on the honest pioneer, would have been sullenly reticent if a stranger had inquired—

"The gateway to what?"

Any sheriff of the river counties, either on the Illinois or Iowa side, would promptly enlighten the curious—

"The gateway to Rag-Town."

If pressed for a description of Rag-Town, the law officer would probably fail to make himself intelligible.

The name of Rag-Town was applied to an indefinite area of rising ground, wooded for half a mile deep along the creeks, rather than to a compact settlement. One might be in Rag-Town and travel quite extensively without discovering a single smoke. If Smith City be accepted as the eastern entrance to this no-man's land, not even the desperadoes who found refuge there could run its western line. Whatever portion of the country was used as a rendezvous for the lawless or afforded sanctuary for those hard-pressed by the law belonged to Rag-Town.

The reputation of this meeting place and resting place varied, according to the bias of the individual. Among honest folk the place was something abhorrent, something to be shunned or destroyed. Sheriffs' writs did not run there. The hand of the law penetrated it infrequently and usually was withdrawn empty. In the estimation of Smith City it was an erratic cornucopia, sometimes withholding

gifts, at other times showering the slatternly women with rich dress-goods and incongruously decking out barefooted men with oddments of finery. By the shifting population of outlaws it was known as a most desirable haven. Any hostile entrance through the Gateway would be preceded by a timely warning, and the various trails leading to three points of the compass were so many back doors through which coiner, thief and murderer could slip away.

A loosely organized body of men known as the Hawkeyes at rare intervals chased an outlaw into Rag-Town and brought him out and hanged him, or, if fearing an attack, hanged him where captured. These coups were counted too infrequently to spoil the area as a rendezvous. Also, such reprisals usually were possible because the fugitive was not a member of the criminal organization. Many men who were not in sympathy with wrong-doing would hesitate to point out the trail of one hunted by the Hawkeyes for three reasons: The independent posse, acting impulsively, might punish the innocent; its riders might number those who hunted with the hounds and ran with the hares; membership afforded an excellent opportunity for the vicious to direct disaster against a personal enemy.

If the cabin folks in Smith City loafed much and traveled but little, yet their lives were not lacking in thrills for any lengthy period of time. Rough men from Rag-Town came through the Gateway for a holiday, and the sound of fiddles and dancing, of drunken singing, kept the night awake. The working arrangement between the Gateway and the camp beyond consisted of loot in exchange for timely warnings. As a result of this *quid pro quo*, neglected children early learned to scurry to cover on hearing the beat of galloping hoofs approaching from the east. Men and almost all the women also would disappear until the business of the riders was ascertained. If the string of horsemen debouching from the wooded slot consisted of desperadoes the life of the little community quickly returned to normal. If a legalized or independent posse emerged from the trace it would be difficult to find man or woman, except the aged and bed-ridden, although a smoke signal might be seen crawling high in the heavens to warn those somewhere west of the gate.

NEAR midday, when the men of Smith City were lounging in front of their cabins, lazily smoking and waiting for dinner to be served, the dull banging of several guns in the east brought instant activity. The children, playing "Hawkeyes and Rag-Towners," scattered like grouse. The firing continued and testified to a close pursuit, to something more than a gesture of the law. Men who were too weary to bring a bucket of water from the creek came to their feet with the agility of athletes and entered the woods on both sides of the rough street. Cabin doors were closed and barred by those who could not take to the bush. From under cabins where hogs had wallows, from under low spreading bushes and from behind trees, sharp eyes were focused on the mouth of the eastern trace.

The firing began again, louder and nearer. The settlement knew this was a hard and desperate chase. Then the eager watchers saw bursting from cover a bareheaded man lying flat on his horse, his right hand extended behind him and rapidly emptying a revolver. At a mad gallop he tore through the straggling street and was quickly hidden from view where the growth resumed its protection to the trace west of the cabins. He had passed through the Gateway, a flashing vision of elegant horsemanship, before three men on laboring mounts entered the settlement from the east.

Hawkins Taylor was in the lead, his rifle held ready for instant use. But his horse appeared to be exhausted. Behind him rode two river-men, armed with rifles and having empty pistols in their belts. Taylor's horse stumbled, and with an oath the rider slipped to the ground. His companions reined in and stared at

the mouth of the path through which the quarry had escaped.

"Well, we done our best, Taylor," said one of the men.

He puffed heavily as if he and not his horse were winded.

"If this —— boneyard had had any guts I'd 'a' got that feller," wrathfully cried the deputy-sheriff. "In the houses, there! Come out, or I'll burn your shacks down!"

Two doors opened and two bedraggled, helpless looking women came out. One who was taking snuff lazily inquired:

"What's all this howdy-do about, mister. Hoss ailin'?"

"You know what it's about. I'm a law officer. I want fresh horses—want 'em mighty quick."

"Land of Gideon!" weakly exclaimed the second woman. "Do tell! And our men are all away 'n' took the hosses with 'em. But you look 'round. If any critter's left, take him. We always go to help the law."

"Yah!" snarled Taylor. "See if you can find anything on four legs, boys."

His companions dismounted and investigated behind the cabins. Their hearts did not appear to be in their work and they took their time. Taylor searched energetically. He ran into the bush and flushed a covey of children. The youngsters scurried away, screaming shrilly and thoroughly enjoying the game. The deputy managed to catch a tow-head, but neither coaxing, bribery nor threats produced information concerning fresh horses. The child was as precocious as a wolf's whelp and refused to speak.

"Reckon we'll have to give it up this time, Taylor," called out one of the men. "If he'd had ordinary hoss-flesh we'd had him miles back. We'll bag him next time, mebbe."

Taylor surrendered and returned to his horse. "All right, boys. We'll get something to eat and start back. You women can give us some victuals?"

Both women assured him he and his men were most welcome. Other doors opened and other women appeared with invitations to "squat" and eat.

While the three men were partaking of fried chicken and pones the fugitive, a scant half mile inside the Gateway, was finding his progress barred by half a dozen men. All had weapons in their belts, but in their hands they held long sticks and sharp knives. All set up a shrill whistling as they spread out and surrounded the rider. The latter scowled at them, then turned to watch his back track and to listen. He could discover no sign of pursuit. He could not advance until he had ridden down three men at the horse's head. He dismounted and asked—

"You men are called what?"

"All being deacons in different churches, we're sometimes called whittlin' deacons," replied the leader. His companions ceased whistling to grin widely.

"I've met whittling deacons in Nauvoo. You took their name."

"Mebbe. Mebbe they took our name."

And the knife sent a long shaving into the fugitive's face.

There came the instinctive move to pull one of the revolvers, but it was stayed almost instantly. Both weapons were empty. The man impatiently demanded:

"Can't you talk instead of flashing those —— knives in my face? Why do you hold me up?"

"Just who might you be, stranger? We're sort of fussy 'bout newcomers in this neck of the woods."

"Name's Porter. Tells you nothing."

"You're runnin' away from something?"

"I was running away. The chase has stopped. I want to be going along."

"Just why you runnin' away, mister?"

The knives were cutting more slowly.

Hedged in by the whittlers, Porter glanced apprehensively back toward the settlement, and then helplessly confessed—

"Running away from a—posse."

"An' where you reckon you're bound for?"

"I want to find a man named Togy. I want to be moving on at once."

"Don't go to frettin'. Don't git onpatient," advised the spokesman of the whittlers. "No one's goin' to come after you from Smith's without a gun bein' fired. I'm Silas Cutts. I sort of keep an eye on the good name of Smith City."

"Then you're just the man to lead me to Togy."

As he spoke Porter thrust a hand into his coat pocket and kept it there as sharp knives were held against his ribs. He told the suspicious, lowering men:

"I have no weapons except these empty guns in my belt. If I had a loaded gun in my pocket I wouldn't try to use it for two reasons: It would mean my death; it would prevent me from finding Togy. Now steady with the knives while I draw out a bit of money."

They watched him like hawks as his hand slowly emerged from the pocket. Between the tips of his fingers was a gold piece. Cutts sucked in his breath with a hissing sound. The men crowded closer to feast their gaze on the coin. Greedy eyes flashed questions. Porter was quick to interpret this exchange of glances. He quietly warned:

"Forget about it. It won't do unless you're ready to answer to Togy and all the men in Rag-Town. I have more gold on me, but it isn't for you. Togy won't like it if I don't show up. He'll cut some throats down here."

"Togy ain't the big boss of Rag-Town," spoke up one of the men.

"You poor, mis'rable fool!" muttered Cutts. "You're diggin' your grave."

"I spoke without thinkin', Silas," whined the offender. Then he fearfully pleaded with the others, "You boys wouldn't git me into trouble? Why, I'm your old friend 'n' neighbor."

Before Cutts or the others could reply Porter was saying tersely:

"I don't care who's boss. Togy's the man I want to find. I'm going ahead. You rabbits may kill me, but you'll pay the price to Rag-Town. Or you can take this gold piece and lead me to Togy."

With this defiance he swung back into the saddle.

Cutts insisted:

"We got to be reg'lar, mister, or pay a fancy price. We ain't honin' to kill nobody. But this must be talked about a trifle. You wait a jiffy." To his companions he said, "Stay here 'n' keep this man comp'ny while Jimmer 'n' me step aside."

The two withdrew from the path and conferred in whispers for several minutes. The whittlers pressed closely around Porter. They dropped their sticks and held their knives close to his body, and each pair of wolfish eyes was focused on the pocket whence had come the gold coin. Cutts and Jimmer came back to the group, and the former told Porter:

"Seein' as how our good names will be muddied up if Hawkins Taylor ever knows we give you help, Jimmer 'n' me think we must have twice as much as you offer if you're led deeper into Rag-Town."

"No, sir!" said Porter. "Do you want this for guiding me, or do I go on alone? Or will you cut your own throats by sticking those knives into me?"

And he opened his hand to disclose the ten-dollar gold piece.

"Laws are ag'in you goin' in alone," said Jimmer.

"What law? I'm a law-buster."

"Why, the law of Rag-Town, mister," replied Jimmer.

"You're a fool. You have no laws except what Togy and others in back make for you. Your business is to size up any stranger when he passes your huts, and to send word or signal his coming. I'm going forward. Let any man who wants to die try to stop me."

He gathered up the reins. The man standing at the head of the horse stared doubtfully at Cutts. The latter cried—

"But what happens to us if we let you through alone?"

"I don't know. I don't care. I've asked you to guide me to some one in authority. If I'm not sound they'll settle my hash."

Cutts drew a deep breath and held out his hand and surrendered:

"I'll risk it. Gimme the money. I'll have to split it with the boys 'n' it won't 'mount to much. But if you don't have some simon-pure business in Rag-Town you'll mighty soon go where hard money melts like snowflakes in summer!"

The men fell back and Cutts started up the trace. Porter rode a dozen feet behind the man. Cutts kept turning his head to stare at the young man. Porter demanded harshly—

"Why do you watch me?"

"Your finnified clothes 'n' shiny shoes, mister," explained Cutts. "If you ain't sound some of the boys is going to be dressed up mighty slick."

"Did you ever lead any one up here who didn't live to return?"

"I'm a mighty poor talker, mister."

With that Cutts started to run with long, loping strides and the horse broke into a trot to keep near him.

Porter estimated two miles had been covered when Cutts halted on a bare knoll at the edge of the timber and began picking up dried twigs and branches. Porter dismounted and asked—

"What's this business mean?"

"Can't lead a stranger beyond here. Not a rod farther for all the gold along the Mississippi. Old Man's orders."

"You mean Togy?"

"I don't mean nothing. I don't know nothing. I don't want to know nothing. The more I don't know the longer I'll live," muttered Cutts as he finished with the dry wood and commenced gathering green stuff.

"Why shouldn't you want to know things?"

"See here, mister, you ask too many —— questions to keep alive 'n' healthy."

"I believe I understand," mused Porter. "You're afraid to know much about what happens this side of the Gateway even if you're a member of the band."

Cutts had lighted the fire, and for a bit he appeared to be tempted to stamp out the tiny flames. His tobacco-stained beard trembled, and his voice trembled as he muttered:

"Them's your words, mister—not mine You're dead wrong. If you'd spoke them words a minute quicker I'd never lighted this blaze. I'm just a neighbor who does neighborly turns."

"You don't think it's healthy to talk about the real boss out here?" persisted Porter.

"You drive it dead center. Less I know the longer I'll have a whole windpipe."

Porter pursed his lips as if to whistle, but made no sound. The dry fuel was crackling and the cap of green grass and leaves was sending a slim, sinuous pencil high into the blue to write a message. The opening from the knoll to the timber in the north and west was not more than a fourth of a mile. Porter stared at the woods; then suddenly asked—

"You're called into the camp at times?"

"Your words ag'in. I don't know nothin' 'bout any camp. An' you quit pesterin' me with questions!" Cutts replied angrily.

"Just one more. What happens next?"

"I don't know. Sha'n't be here to see. Smoke will be spotted. Some one'll come to look you over. Say, mister, wish you'd tuck some hard money under that rock on the left. I could come back 'n' git it if you found you didn't have no use for it."

"Bad as that, eh? And you won't wait to see what happens?"

"No, sirree! Stick here or your life ain't worth two bits. I'm quittin' now."

With that he ran down the knoll and into the timber as if pursued by Death.

Porter seated himself and stared up at the wavering spiral of smoke. The trace from Smith City ran over the knoll and along the edge of the timber and entered the grove in the west. Porter shifted his watchful gaze from the mouth of the leafy tunnel to the timber in the north. As the minutes passed and no one appeared, Porter began to believe the signal had not been seen. The smoke ceased to ascend. Porter came to his feet and was starting for his horse, grazing at the

foot of the knoll, when he was startled by a deep voice behind him, commanding:

"Halt! Both hands up!"

He obeyed and turned about. The voice came from the direction Cutts had taken in returning to Smith City. Instead of appearing from the west or north where he would be visible for a quarter of a mile of open country, the man had circled south of the knoll to approach close under cover.

He did not locate the position of the unseen man until the sunlight glistened on a rifle barrel resting on a rock. He called out:

"They're both up. Come ahead."

A tall, heavily built man, with his face concealed by a bushy, blue-black beard, rose from behind the rock, and with his rifle aimed at Porter's breast he approached and commanded—

"Face t'other way!"

Porter spun about, and felt the hand clawing his guns from the belt. He said—

"Both are empty."

The man grunted; then ordered—

"You can take your arms down 'n' squat till we find out what's this all about."

Porter dropped on the grass and faced the big man, who remained standing. Without waiting to be questioned, Porter began:

"Sheriff named Taylor and two men chased me as far as Smith City. I hired a man named Cutts to lead me up here to meet a man called Togy."

"What you want of Togy?"

"I'm wanted by the law. Heard Taylor cursing Togy before he started after me. I thought Togy would be a good man for me to throw in with, to tie to. Took the chance anyway. Here I am."

"Togy's here, too. I'm Togy."

Porter's face crinkled with a broad smile. He declared warmly:

"I'm mighty glad to meet up with the boss of Rag-Town."

He drew his heels under him and impulsively started to rise and shake hands. But Togy jerked a big knife from the top of his cowhide boot so quickly that Porter caught only the motion of the uplifted knee.

"Settle back!" rumbled Togy. "Don't be so quick to get acquainted."

His deep voice reminded Porter of thunder rolling down an upland valley.

Sitting cross-legged, his hands on his knees, Porter complained—

"No wonder a sheriff can't ever lay paws on you when a well-wisher can't shake hands without having his heart split."

"What's your name? Where you from? What's your game?"

"Enoch Porter. New Orleans. Came up the river with Spencer Stokes's river show. Been peddling queer money in the river towns. Want to take on with you."

Togy exploded in passionate blasphemy. When he could be coherent he said:

"There's nerve for you! So you're the critter that got the river all het up with clumsy counterfeits an' put a crimp in our game!"

"No, sir!" sharply denied Porter. "I'm the critter who put out such good looking money that it's still being gladly accepted by merchants."

"Like —— you be! Then why did Taylor git after you?"

"Dead man two miles out of Montrose. Taylor allowed I knew something about how and when he was killed."

"Huh. Dead man. What sort of a looking man?"

"Slimbuilt. Clean-shaven. Face looked a pasty white."

Togy's eyes sparkled.

"Did you hear what he's called?" he asked.

"Called Stacy."

Togy nodded his shaggy head.

"That's the feller! Sent out here to catch coiners. Man who never quits a trail once he strikes it. That would be mighty good hearing for Rag-Town if we knew it's true." Now he was deeply suspicious. He sneered. "Any sneak can tell that yarn and make off how he killed a man-hunter."

"I don't claim I killed him. Came near swinging because they reckoned I did. Taylor picked me up, but I proved an alibi. Let me loose, then decided he wanted me from papers he took from the dead man's body. I had start enough to clear out. Chased into Smith City."

"An' fetch the whole b'iling of law officers ag'in Rag-Town "

"The three men turned back at Smith City. If you'll put your hand in my inside coat pocket you'll find what put Taylor on my track after I'd got free of the killing charge."

"Both hands behind you!" ordered Togy.

With knife in one hand he advanced and slipped his free hand inside the coat and drew forth a reward-notice of five hundred dollars for intelligence leading to the arrest and conviction of a coiner going under the name of Porter. Togy read the description slowly, pausing with every few words to dart his fierce gaze at his prisoner's countenance."

"You got one paper. There's another," said Porter.

This time Togy secured a notice of a thousand dollars reward for the slayer of Robert Stacy. The bill had been recently turned out of some printing-shop on the river and was much inferior in workmanship to the first paper. When he had finished reading the second paper Togy admitted:

"Looks like the good news is true. But that don't help you any. Hurts you. Stacy was too big a man to be rubbed out without the Government doing everything to find his killer. That means they'll come ag'in Rag-Town. And I can't turn you back to blab what you found on this side of the gate."

"Which is nothing. Every officer in Iowa knows about Rag-Town. I'm not the first man to be chased through Smith City. If you don't take me in or turn me back—what?"

"You've answered your own question," said Togy as he thoughtfully stroked his beard. "The boys would vote it would be best if you was found near the river."

"All right, I'm helpless," sullenly said Porter. "And you'd be a prime lot of fools. When you kill me you kill a million dollars."

Fires blazed in the brooding eyes.

"What you trying to talk now?" he sharply cried.

"My knack of coining hard money."

"Bah! We make it without any help from strangers."

"But you can't make the kind I make."

And Porter smiled in self-appreciation.

"If you're so —— fired smart, show your goods!"

The hand started for a pocket was halted by the point of the knife touching the gay waistcoat. Porter's hand went up. He said—

"Right hand pocket."

Togy's hairy hand disappeared and drew out two ten-dollar gold pieces. "Eagles!" he exclaimed incredulously. He was so amazed by the appearance of the money he was off his guard for several seconds. Porter folded his arms and waited. "——! You didn't make these!" roared Togy.

Porter quietly told him:

"You folks out here do crude work. You never learned to do good work. Why shouldn't I make them? Some man made them. They didn't happen. When we make bogus money in the East we have to take pride in what we turn out. Stuff you pass out here wouldn't last a minute in the East. You'll admit that's smooth enough to pass anywhere along the river?"

Togy was fascinated by the excellence of the coins. His voice was hoarse as he mumbled—

"How much of this did you fetch along?"

"About a thousand dollars. What I happen to have left when I quit the showboat at Keokuk. It's in my saddle-bag. Right hand side."

Togy bit a coin and tested it with his strong fingers. He had to thrust his knife in his belt to do this. Porter waited. Finally Togy pocketed the coins and said:

"I know now that Stacy wa'n't out

here for any of our boys. He was after you."

"Well, if he was after me he didn't get me. And he's dead."

Togy frowned, as if irresolute. When he spoke it was to say frankly:

"If it wa'n't for the coins there'd be no room in Rag-Town for you. As it is the risk is mighty big."

"You and your men have risked hanging a hundred times for the most onery sort of loot," jeered Porter.

"Never risked having any man like Stacy after me."

"Your work's too poor to scare the Government, you think? See here, Stacy isn't after you any more. Are you afraid of Taylor?"

"Taylor!" sneered Togy. "I ain't 'fraid of all the sheriffs on the river. Can you turn out more of them coins—do it in Rag-Town?"

"In any amount after I get certain supplies," assured Porter.

"As what?"

"Muriatic acid and nitric acid. Gold dissolved in four parts of the first and one of the other will give me my gold chloride. Then, with a galvanic battery I'll plate copper coins."

"You'd have to go away to git the stuff?" Togy asked suspiciously.

"No. I didn't come here to turn around and go back. Any man can take my written list and pick up what I want along the river. Might have to go to St. Louis for the battery. There's a man there who can supply the copper coins in the right size. Can't get a fire hot enough to melt copper up here."

"You made yours on the show-boat?"

"Made them in the East. Show folks didn't know what I was doing."

"Takes time to send a man to St. Louis," mused Togy.

"Time enough to go and get back. Yes. How much would a man's time be worth loafing around your camp? If there wasn't some trouble in turning out coins they'd be so thick as to be worth nothing even if they were genuine."

"That sounds foolish. But listen. You don't want to die—and you don't want to go back to the river?"

Porter shook his head energetically. Togy continued—

"You'd be willin' and glad to throw in the coins you fetched along?"

"Certainly."

"And make lots more just as good if you was taken into Rag-Town?"

"No end of them."

Togy drew a deep breath and agreed:

"I reckon we can trade. I'll show the boys the two coins as sample and take the rest for myself. No more'n fair, as I'll mebbe have to do some rough talking to git them into the right notion so they'll vote you in."

"You're welcome to what's in the saddle-bag," promptly assured Porter. "I want a place to sleep without keeping a hand on a gun."

"The Old Man'll have a word to say. But he most always votes as I do. The time's coming when we'll have to clear out. Prob'ly after the Mormons quit the Illinois shore."

"I'm to understand that we've traded?" asked Porter.

"Yes. But you're to understand that while I give orders to the boys the Old Man does the thinking for the whole outfit. He's a keen-minded critter. He makes a good silver dollar and we git rid of a lot of 'em. You will give the money, knowing I ain't the big boss, and you won't tell any one about it?"

"Of course. What difference does it make? Why, that stuff is so much dirt to me. After I get started I can turn it out in barrels."

"My ——!" So overwhelmed was Togy by avaricious visions he was physically affected. In a hoarse whisper he said, "You make the stuff and I'll git rid of it. We'll clean up enough profits to live on cake the rest of our life. Then we'll start new in some new place and live like gen'l'men. I've always hankered for a big plantation down in Mississippi. Just one thing to keep in the front of your head. You're up here 'n' you can't git

away. If you try any game I'll cut your weazen from ear to ear!"

Porter chuckled and replied—

"I'd be a fool to risk my neck getting here and then risk it a second time by trying to run away."

"Then we'll go."

Porter mounted his horse and Togy walked behind him. They followed the trace to the woods to the west and, after advancing a few rods into the timber, Togy softly called a halt and told Porter to remain quiet. He then disappeared into the growth and moved with such stealth that if Porter had not glimpsed him crossing the trace ahead he never would have suspected he was making a circuit of their position. The moment the tall figure vanished in the growth on Porter's left, the latter opened his saddle-bag and transferred a double handful of coins to an inside pocket. For ten minutes more he remained in the saddle before Togy stepped from the growth behind him.

Nervous perspiration dotted the man's forehead as he came alongside the horse and whispered:

"Just made sure none of the boys was scouting 'round to see what they could see. I'll stand close and you put the stuff in my side pocket."

Porter made short work of emptying the saddle-bag. Togy found the weight sagged his coat and paused to distribute it more evenly among other pockets. When he finished he said:

"I could 'a' done for you and taken this, but I've got a long head. Most of the boys would take quick profits and leave you behind a bush. Now we'll swing northwest and strike the big knoll where we have our lookout cabin. I happened to be there when Cutts made the smoke."

"How many men in your band?"

"Ten, when they're all in. Too many. Five is enough. Four to be out at work, t'other at the camp. Sometimes we git a man that seems all right and he turns out to lack guts. He's sent away."

"I should hope so," said Porter. "I don't want to be where there's any weak-knees. Send them away."

"They're sent so far they never come back," added Togy grimly.

"Of course. That's what I meant."

"By ——! You're a cool one. I'm thinking you'll be a ring-tailed snorter," softly exclaimed Togy. "What did you say you did in the river-show?"

"Quick, straight shooting with my revolvers. Only thing I could do to get a place. I'd never come out here if I hadn't had sound cover to work from."

"Of course. We're gitting close to the lookout. Don't jump if I give a squawk. Don't say nothing 'bout the dead man. The Old Man has some queer notions—won't stand for killings. Says every dead man fetches the sheriff or the Hawkeyes so much closer. Mebbe he's right."

"I believe he is. Why call attention to yourself when you've got a slick game."

Togy nodded in approval. After another few rods something rustled in the growth. Togy lifted his voice in a wolf-howl. It was promptly answered. A few more rods and they could see a small cabin perched on a high knoll at the edge of the timber. A man with a rifle was waiting for them at the end of the cabin. Togy walked rapidly ahead and talked briefly. The man seemed to disapprove and shook his head stubbornly. He directed a lowering look at Porter and insisted—

"The boys should 'a' gone down and passed on him at the signal-knoll before letting him come up here."

"You —— fool! What difference does it make?" cried Togy, beginning to lose his temper. "If he's sound, he's sound. If he ain't sound he gits a knife in his gizard."

"The gineral rule is—"

"The most 'portant rule for you to keep in mind, Ben, is to hark when I speak!" savagely interrupted Togy. "Here's something to better your mem'ry." He drew back his hairy fist and knocked the man flat. The man slowly climbed to his feet and spat blood and grinned feebly.

"Any more yap 'bout gineral rule?"

"Lor'bless you, no. I ain't much of a talker. I'm only saying I've got enough."

"All right. See you don't make any sneaking talk at the bunkhouse. Come along, Porter. Camp's just across the opening."

"You have to use a high hand at times," remarked Porter.

"A hard hand, Porter. It's like handling a pack of wolves. I never let one show his teeth without lammin' him."

"The right way to handle them. I'll remember."

Togy swung his heavy head about and warned:

"I don't mean you're to show any mettle. You be quiet 'n' soft spoken. If the boys pick on you, you grin 'n' bear it, being a new man, till I put a stop to it."

CHAPTER III

RAG-TOWN

AS THE two were crossing the opening Togy announced—

"You're in Rag-Town."

Porter now discovered the woods ahead consisted of an open oak growth, a green ribbon following a creek. Smoke rose above the timber and Porter remarked—

"And there's the settlement."

"Bunkhouse and a few cabins. Rag-Town's scattered widely. We've got shacks snugly hid in timber twenty miles west of here. That's Rag-Town as much as this. Heart of the place is where the band happens to be living. If a posse ever busts through the Gateway we can fall back or move north, and smoke our pipes till it gits tired and goes home. Howsomever, we don't look for no posses till after the Mormons pull out."

"Blame things on to them," laughed Porter.

"Something like that. Whigs 'n' Democrats take turns being so mad at them they are always being blamed by one party or t'other for what they don't do."

They crossed the creek and were soon emerging from the timber into the end of an opening which stretched far to the east. Ahead was a long log cabin in front of which several men were lounging and watching the newcomers. Togy grinned and stroked his spade of a beard and said:

"Boys are all het up along of you. Mighty few strangers come to Rag-Town, less they're fetched."

"You take some prisoners?"

"Not now. They're a bother. Fetched in a feller to hold till his folks paid for his return. He got loose 'n' killed one of our best men before we could give him his come-uppance. That was before the Old Man took the reins. His rule is to go after property, put out silver dollars and not spill blood. Some of the boys don't like it—says it hampers 'em. That's where I come in. I see that orders are carried out. Our boys are prime fighters, but they haven't much brains. Can't seem to understand that every killing works the country up ag'in' us. You keep shet. I'll do the talking."

He motioned for Porter to dismount. Four men stood before the long house, gaunt, desperate looking creatures. They had rifles in their hands, and knives and long-barreled pistols in their belts. The lowering expression on each face bespoke of their disapproval of the stranger. One man, whose face was hideous from a scar extending from the lobe of his ear down to and through the upper lip, suspiciously asked:

"What's this mean, Togy, fetching in a stranger afore it's talked over?"

Togy grunted a blasphemy and would have driven a big fist into the man's face if the latter had not leaped back with the quickness of a wildcat. The scarred lip twitched high over the yellow teeth as he cried—

"No harm meant."

A sidelong glance at the other men caused Togy to pause. The three men were staring at him closely. One had his thumbs hooked into a belt close to two pistols. Togy controlled his temper and did not attempt to complete the assault. In his deep, rumbling voice he warned—

"Splad, you 'n' me will have trouble

some day if you don't keep in mind who you're yapping at—a lasting trouble for you!"

"I didn't mean nothing out the way," muttered Splad. "I reckoned you wouldn't fetch in a body who aint sound."

"Then what you fussing so ranktankerous for?" demanded Togy.

"We're sort of upset," shrilly volunteered another, before Splad could answer. Porter eyed the speaker curiously. He wore no beard and his face was the color of saddle-leather and oddly set off by brows of yellowish white. He reminded the Easterner of a man badly made-up on the stage. The high pitch of his voice, almost the treble of adolescence, came as a surprize to one hearing it for the first time. His words afforded Togy a graceful withdrawal from a further attempt at discipline. Togy switched his attention, and asked:

"What do you mean, Piper? What can go wrong so quick?"

"The bag in the bunkhouse has been stolen."

Togy's beard seemed to bristle and expand. He swept his gaze over the sullen faces and demanded—

"Is this true, what Piper says?"

Splad advanced and bitterly confirmed his statement by saying:

"True's ——! That is, the stuff in the bag has been took and small flat stones left in their place. Piper was going to take it outside and noticed the stuff was in different sizes. He wouldn't budge till the bag was opened before all of us. Some one had emptied the bag 'n' filled it up with trash."

"And a pretty piece of work for me if I'd got to the Gateway afore finding it out," cried Piper. "I'd been blamed as a thief and hid in the ground."

"A thief in Rag-Town!" gasped Togy incredulously. A young man with a narrow, cruel face grinned at the unconscious irony of the exclamation. "Does the Old Man know about it?"

The four heads wagged a negation. Splad further explained:

"Didn't find it out till after you'd started down to the lookout cabin. And you'd ordered that no one was to go to the Old Man 'less sent for."

Togy frowned and arranged his thoughts. He slowly checked off:

"The bag was sent to the bunkhouse last night. I fetched it. Piper was to take it out today. I slept in my cabin; you four in the bunkhouse. I was at the lookout with Ben when a smoke called me down to the knoll to talk with a feller. Piper didn't guess anything was wrong till after I'd gone to the lookout."

Splad's puckered lips drew up in a snarl as he agreed—

"That's right—not till after you'd gone."

The slight pause brought a lurid light to Togy's eyes. There was the suggestion of an innuendo. He was staring at Splad when the fourth man reminded—

"Two hoss-guards come down from the herd on their way out last evening."

"Must 'a' been one of them," said Piper.

"The money didn't walk away. It was in the bag when I put the bag in the bunkhouse," slowly said Togy. "We'll look after the hoss-guards. It seems there's a low-down, onery thief among us—one who'll steal from his mates. What's been stole don't 'mount to shucks, but that thief must be found."

The man with the narrow face coolly asked—

"A bag of round silver dollers don't 'mount to shucks, Togy?"

"Fox, you're talking Rag-Town business afore a stranger," angrily reminded Piper.

Fox eyed him evilly and replied softly:

"—— you, Piper! I never did like you."

"That'll do a plenty," warned Togy. "I mean just what I said. It don't 'mount to shucks alongside of what we'll be handling pretty soon."

And he clapped a hand on Porter's shoulder.

The four men were filled with greedy curiosity. They drew closer. Togy continued:

"There's a traitor in the band, but I

know you men ring true. When the herders git back I'll talk to them. Now, boys, we'll git acquainted with this new man. He's called Enoch Porter. Porter, these men from right to left are Splad, Piper, Fox and Birch. Boys, Porter is to be taken in."

"Taken in after he's been voted in," quietly reminded Fox.

"Don't try to run things, Fox," whined Piper. The narrow face was convulsed with rage. Piper's hand closed over a pistol.

Togy wrathfully warned:

"I'll do for the two of you on the spot if you let your bad blood reach the b'iling point! If you two must fight we'll pick the right time and lock you up in a cabin for the night. I said Porter will be one of us. I know the rules. I mean he'll be taken in because you'll be keen to take him in. Think I'm crazy to fetch a stranger up here without good reasons? Porter, show the boys some of your work."

Porter drew two gold coins from his pocket and tossed one to Splad and the other to Piper. The heads of the men were bunched close together. Splad was the first to speak. He demanded—

"How much of this stuff did you steal and fetch in here, Porter?"

Togy's shaggy head went back in a silent laugh. Then he impressively explained:

"Porter didn't steal those coins. He made 'em!"

Piper tried to speak and chattered shrilly. Others expressed amazement. Birch was the first to show scepticism. When he could be heard he cried—

"He'll have to make some before I'll believe it!"

"How do you know he made 'em? See him do it?" challenged Fox.

"Don't be a fool, Fox. Of course I didn't see him make 'em. But do a little thinking. This man's from the East. He traveled with the Stokes river-show that some of you wanted to risk capture by going to see down in Keokuk. He used the show as a cover. He quit it along of a pasty-faced man the Government sent out here to catch him."

"Stacy! Bob Stacy!" exclaimed Splad.

"Who's even now on his trail, tagging him up here!" added Fox.

"Not 'less the dead walk," Togy said grimly. "Stacy was found dead near Montrose." He paused to let the welcome intelligence sink in. The men's reaction from fear to relief was very obvious. Togy produced the two handbills and passed them over to Piper. Each man in turn studied them. When they had finished Togy continued:

"Hawkins Taylor accused Porter of doing for Stacy. Porter got away from him and was chased into Smith City. Cutts fetched him to the knoll and made a smoke. When I see he was a stranger I expected to come back alone. But after seeing that coin, boys, I was mighty keen to fetch him back with me. Soon as a man can fetch in some supplies from the river Porter will make no end of that stuff."

"What if he can't make 'em?" suggested Birch. "What if he says he can so's to have a snug hiding place till it's safe for him to return to the river?"

"Then he's the biggest fool ever west the river," replied Togy. "If he don't do the trick he'll never leave Rag-Town."

"These look as good as Government money. I've seen 'em and had 'em," said Fox.

"Would there be any sense in my fetching him here if he made such poor ones that anybody could see they were bogus?" countered Togy. "That's the fine part of the whole business. You can pass these in any place along the river and go back day after day and pass some more. Coiners in the East have to be fussy. Folks back there don't grab at everything that looks like hard money. Our silver wouldn't fool a child in the East."

"I want to see him make some," insisted Birch.

Speaking for the first time since entering the presence of the four men, Porter said:

"You will not see me make any. No

one, not even Togy, will watch me make them. You will see the finished work and share in it, and that's enough."

"You're pretty —— uppity for a new man," said Fox.

Togy lifted a hand for silence and wrinkled his brows and after a bit of heavy pondering he asked Porter—

"Why do you have to be secret about it?"

"Because some of these men might take a notion to ease a knife across my throat once they believed they'd got the knack of making these coins. You get the stuff. Isn't that enough? If a man steals a horse you don't insist on watching him do it."

"You come here to hide, but you don't trust us," sneered Birch.

"Not after learning that some one in this outfit stole a bag of silver dollars."

"But we've got to take you on trust," jeered Fox.

"For a while, yes. You can always end it by killing me. You've seen the reward offered for me. I came here to stay. I believed I had something to trade for food and shelter. I knew I couldn't get away when I waited on the knoll until Togy had me covered. I might as well have surrendered to Taylor as to come here and pretend I could do what I could not do. Now if a man will steal a bag of counterfeit silver dollars, why won't he steal my secret—and kill me in the bargain?"

"You all see what the thief has done to us so quick," complained Togy. Then reflectively, "But Porter will take orders the same as the rest. Now let's go to the bunkhouse."

As they walked to the house Fox asked Porter—

"Where did you git that hoss?"

"Found him."

"Why, this feller's so pernickity he won't tell nothing," railed Fox.

Togy savagely informed Porter:

"Just remember you don't belong yet. You can't join less every man present and the Old Man vote for you. Don't go out of your way to be brash with the boys."

"I don't go to be brash," earnestly insisted Porter. "But is there a man here, with everything to win and nothing to lose, who's fool enough to vote against me? If so, then I was a fool to think I was bringing here something too valuable to be thrown away—the knack of doing a certain job better than it'll ever be done up here by any other man. My hard luck is your good luck. If there had been an opening in any other direction I'd taken it. I believed any man in any outfit of this kind would be keen to have me join. If I've made a mistake, then some one will put a knife into me, or a bullet through me, and keep on peddling dollars where he could have put out eagles. I gambled on you men having common sense."

"You're highfalutin and most eddicated," sullenly said Fox. "I won't stick out to see you make the stuff. Birch won't, either. We was just cur'ous. But it did rile me to be snapped up so sassy over a stolen hoss."

"I got the horse in Fort Madison. I don't know who owned him. He was hitched outside a house. I rode him back to where I had left my blown nag and had hid my saddle and bags. It was that lost time that allowed Taylor and his two men to get close."

"You git uppity afore you have any cause," complained Splad.

"I reckon that's true. I'm too touchy," frankly admitted Porter. "But I've had a trying time and a close rub. Perhaps I have too high an opinion of myself and was foolish to think no outfit could afford to turn me down. I'm thought well of in the East—among some smart people. Of course there isn't any man in this outfit who will be working for every man-jack of you as I will be doing. I'll be working while you're resting between raids as well as when you're out on a raid. You all understand the last thing I wanted to do was to come up here and make enemies."

Piper's high, thin voice declared:

"Boys, he's talked hoss-sense. As long as I git my share of the stuff I'll make no kick."

Togy grinned expansively and said:

"Strange dog's always looked over by t'other dogs. We're all thinking about the same now. Here's the bunkhouse and we'll vote. Then I'll tell the Old Man and git his vote."

He led the way inside and the men followed him, each already beginning to picture what he would do with a fortune in gold. The pictures were much alike and included the great river and much travel on the big steamboats, and plenty of legal money to risk at cards and spend on drink and women.

As they were filling in their pictures Porter counted twelve bunks and decided, from the kettles and pots near the fireplace, that the long building was kitchen and dining-room as well as a lodging-house. At the upper end of the room was a stack of clothing, including some feminine finery. Barrels and boxes of provisions, an array of jugs and a quantity of store tobacco were scattered along one wall.

Togy endeavored to give a ceremonial air to the proceedings by briefly recounting the reasons for Porter's coming to Rag-Town. Again he dwelt on the benefits to accrue to the organization because of the newcomer's skill. He smacked his lips with great relish as he quoted Porter's promise to turn out the delectable coins in barrel lots. If any man had felt pique or caution when he entered the room he was swept away from it all by Togy's talk. When a show of hands was called for the five voted to receive the candidate.

Togy was in high good humor, or perhaps he wished to make amends for the blow struck in anger. He told Fox:

"Jump on a hoss and scoot down to Ben and send him up to vote. It ain't needed under the rules, but I want to make a good showing to the Old Man. You stay at the lookout till Ben gits back. Porter, you'll find stuff to write with at the end of the room. Make out your list. I'll start one of the herders for the river tonight."

Fox started off at a mad gallop. Porter rummaged in the miscellaneous loot and, with the head of a barrel for a table, quickly listed the articles he should need. In giving the paper to Togy he called attention to the last item, the address of a man in St. Louis, who would supply everything.

"I think it would be best for him to drop down the river direct and get everything there."

"I'll start a man mighty soon."

Splad's scarred lip worked up and down as he musingly remarked—

"Sounds like it would be quite a while afore we begin to git results."

"It isn't a trick one can do offhand," agreed Porter. "But it won't take long after I get started. While the man's gone I'll hunt up some suitable clay for a matrix. A less fussy job could be turned out quicker."

"Why not turn out one quick batch and then take time on t'other while the first is being worked off?" querulously asked Birch.

"That's the short-sighted way of looking at it," replied Porter.

The idea appealed to Togy, however, who said—

"But we could git rid of a batch, even if it ain't up to your best."

"Sure you could, and perhaps alarm the river by its being discovered, and then be chased away by sheriffs when you took out my best work. Why, one batch of poor work will fix the river so no one will take gold, not even the genuine stuff. The big money is in the slower, safer way."

Porter's easy assurance irritated the men. Splad glumly reminded:

"Look here, mister, don't forgit it ain't for you to say what you'll do and won't do. If you're ordered to turn off a second-best batch, that's your job."

"Yes, sir. And I'll obey orders. Orders from Togy, same as you all do. But I'll take no orders from any one except Togy."

"——! I'll stand for waiting for the best lot you can make, but I won't stand for so much free 'n' wide talkin'!" cried Birch.

"I'm a member of this band now, so far as your vote's concerned. I expect to

be treated as well as you'd treat any other member. Can't you understand that the passing of poorly made bogus coin in driblets will get us nothing beyond a few hundred or a thousand dollars? You must know the alarm will be louder over a gold piece than a silver piece. Every town, every merchant, will be warned against gold. Steamboats will spread the alarm from the foot of the Lower Rapids to New Orleans."

Togy nodded his head and said:

"Boys, he's right. If we hurry the job we'll lose. But, Porter, you don't git what Birch means. What fusses him is your raspin' way of talking. Sort of a I-know-it-all way. The boys are willing to wait till you've done good work, but saddle your tongue. Keep in mind you're no better'n one of the herders, so far as coming to heel when I bark."

"I'm not looking for trouble," said Porter. "But I don't like to be yanked up by Birch or any one else except you. Birch can't call me to heel. Now my plan—"

"Your plan!" snarled Birch. "There you go again! The Old Man and Togy will name the plans you'll follow."

"Let's not quarrel," spoke up Piper. "'Nough to remember is that no man on the river can tell his coins from them made by the Government."

Porter smiled and bowed low in acknowledgment.

"The average man can't tell them from the genuine," he graciously explained to Piper. "But what if some Eastern man who knows coins should see some of the first to reach St. Louis? Or say a St. Louis man who's used to testing gold with acid? The secret would be out. What I tried to tell Birch is this: My plan is to be patient and make a big supply and work it all off in a rush."

"Well, well, let's not go over that ag'in," said Togy impatiently. "Here comes Ben."

The lookout man swung from the horse and came through the doorway on the jump and loudly inquired:

"Can this feller turn everything into gold? Then I vote for him right smart."

Togy explained the capacity of the candidate. Ben was considerably disappointed, as Fox's talk had led him to believe a Midas had come to Rag-Town. He voted as had the others and at once started back to his station. Porter watched him closely to discover any rancor against Togy for the savage blow he had received. There was no outward sign of resentment, and Porter was strongly impressed by that fact. There was one who gave orders to Togy. The thought prompted him to inquire—

"How far is the chief from here—the one you call the Old Man?"

"You ain't a member yet," coldly reminded Splad.

"Splad's right," said Togy. "You stick close to this house till the Old Man's had his say."

"What if he votes against me?"

Togy shrugged his shoulders and looked aside. Splad and Piper exchanged glances through half-closed eyes. Birch grinned openly. Then Togy was saying:

"We'll cross that crick when we reach it. I never knew a man refusing to make a gold-mine feel to home." And the hand in the capacious pocket, gently caressing the coins Porter had given him, reminded him he must withdraw long enough to hide them. He bruskly told Porter, "You stay here. Don't wander more'n a rod from the house. I'll soon be back. You boys keep Porter comp'ny."

With Togy gone, the men studied Porter's fastidious attire in detail and talked him over among themselves as if he were something inanimate. He showed no interest in their side remarks, although some were intended to irritate. Birch's attention was held by the two revolvers. He reached forward to remove one from the belt. His wrist was caught in an iron grip and forced aside. This repulsion loosed the man's hot temper. He leaped back and snarled— "Keep your —— paws off'n me!"

"Keep your —— paws off my guns!" warned Porter.

Splad warned—

"Folks don't take no liberties with Birch."

"Then let him be careful and take no liberties with me," replied Porter.

"I was just looking at your guns," growled Birch.

"No one but Enoch Porter pulls those guns."

"Some hellion with 'em, I opine," sneered Birch.

"I'm clever with them, yes."

Piper took this as his cue to prevent trouble, and he hurriedly asked—

"Just what did you do with 'em in the river-show?"

"Fancy shooting."

"Prove it. Shoot," challenged Splad.

Porter pointed to some empty bottles and said:

"Step outside and toss a couple in the air after I've loaded. Guns are empty."

He soon had both weapons loaded and took his position just outside the door. Splad, with a bottle in each hand, grinned at Birch and called out—

"Git ready."

Porter did not draw a weapon but stood with his thumbs hooked in his belt.

"I'm ready," he announced.

Splad's two hands moved as one, tossing the bottles high, to right and left. A gun cracked twice, and both bottles returned to earth in fragments. Birch eyed Porter dubiously. Splad's spoiled lip crawled up, but he said nothing. But Piper's voice became falsetto in praise of the marksmanship. Birch scowled in jealousy as he said slowly—

"I'll agree that's good bottle shootin', mister, but what you'd do to a target that would be shootin' back is another matter."

"A living target would never shoot back if we started with an even break," crisply replied Porter as he blew the smoke from the long barrel.

"Is that so?" sneered Birch. "And how do you handle yourself when you can't do trick-shootin' and ain't got no knife, mister?"

"I believe I handle myself well."

"Is that so? I reckon you'll have to prove it."

Porter quickly unfastened his belt and said:

"You're too smart, Birch. You want to know too much. Put down your weapons and have some fun."

With a whoop of delight Birch discarded his long knife and pistol, leaped in the air and cracked his heels and flapped his arms and crowed like a rooster. The next second he was attacking Porter with the fury of a wildcat. Splad and Piper held their breath and then gasped in amazement, as the gyrating human knot suddenly became untied. Birch rolled violently, head over heels, for several yards. Porter remained erect, his hair pawed low over the forehead. When Birch could get on his feet he screamed:

"A —— trick! Try it ag'in!"

For the second time he charged, but came to a plunging halt just out of reach and, crouching over, drew a knife from his bootleg. Deaf to the warning cries of Splad and Piper, he hurled himself at Porter. The latter easily avoided the wild rush by stepping aside and caught his infuriated assailant under the jaw with a terrible smash. The force of the blow lifted Birch off his feet and toppled him backward. He struck heavily and remained as if dead. At that moment Togy came charging on to the scene, his eyes blazing and a long knife gripped in his hand.

He came to a halt as he beheld the inanimate figure. A glance at Porter's bleeding knuckles furnished an explanation. Panting heavily, he demanded:

"What's this mean? Who was shooting guns? What's happened to Birch?"

Porter told him:

"The men wanted to see what I could do with a gun. Then that skunk wanted a fight. He was bested and tried to knife me."

As he finished he picked the knife from the ground and tossed it beside the insensible man.

Togy glared at Splad and Piper for

confirmation or denial. Splad held his tongue. Piper testified:

"Birch dogged him into a ring-rassle, then drew his knife on him. That's after Porter done some nifty bottle-bustin'."

Togy angrily told them:

"You two men knew better. You knew it was ag'in' the rules to shoot guns in Rag-Town. Porter didn't know. He knows now."

He was interrupted by the clumping of hoofs behind him. He wheeled as Fox ended a mad gallop by leaping to the ground, a knife in his hand, and glared savagely around.

"False alarm. All's well, Fox," said Togy. "Boys busted the rule by gitting Porter to shoot his guns. They won't do it ag'in."

"All's well!" screamed Fox. "But Birch there on his back! Who done for him?"

And he stabbed his gaze at first one man and then another.

"Hold your hosses, Fox!" Togy warned sharply. "Birch got brash with Porter and tried to knife him. Porter lammed him one. Wish it had broken his —— neck!"

The dilated eyes contracted and were almost closed. He studied Porter in silence for a few moments, then replaced his knife and told Togy:

"There's bad blood here. I ask a chance to wash it out."

"He's in his rights, Togy," eagerly reminded Splad, the scarred lip jerking spasmodically.

Togy frowned and asked—

"You mean Porter's stirred you up into wanting to fight?"

Fox bared his teeth and nodded. Then he explained—

"He can't go knockin' my friend 'round without settling with me."

"He's in his rights," solemnly repeated Splad. "Mebbe it's better if they git it out of their blood."

Togy regretfully informed Porter:

"It's one of our rules. It stops killings. I can't see any sense in this case, but if Fox feels wolfish 'round the shoulders he can ask a fight with the man he's mad at."

Porter eyed Fox curiously and inquired—

"What if a man refuses to fight?"

"He sets hisself down as a sneakin', measly coward!" cried Splad.

"Worse'n that," whispered Fox.

Porter threw off his coat and waistcoat and announced:

"All right. I'm a prime fighter anyway you want to take me. Get ready, son."

Fox made no move, but said:

"Not till after supper. In the bunkhouse. I want all the boys to see it and enj'y it."

"You bloodthirsty young whelp!" grumbled Togy. "None of the boys will be in tonight. Git to work and git the fire out of your blood."

Fox grinned and shook his head and insisted—

"After supper, Birch will want to see it."

"He's in his right," said Splad.

"Don't I know the rules? Stop yapping that!" thundered Togy.

Porter resumed his garment and agreed:

"After supper will be fine. Seems a man can belong to this outfit and still be outside it. Togy, I don't like the way some of the men act toward me. After supper I'm going to give Fox his needings. If there's any more who want to feed on raw meat I'll take them on, one at a time. After that's finished I don't want any more of this silly fooling."

Togy did not relish such free speaking.

"After supper it is. But you didn't have to make all that fighting talk."

Birch was opening his eyes and Fox was whispering to him and helping him to his feet. Splad ran to assist. Togy jerked his head and Porter followed him one side. Togy warned—

"You're setting all the men ag'in' you."

"I tried to be nice and they thought I lacked sand. The only way to get along with them is to outcrow them."

"You'll find it tough wheelin' to outcrow or outfight young Fox."

"No sir! I'm the best man in a rough-and-tumble fight you've got here."

"——! Will you keep that yap closed?" cried Togy. "You're almost saying you're keen to take me on. If the boys got that notion I'd take your full measure if I had to break your neck."

"I don't understand it," murmured Porter. "Every one is free to talk wide and handsome, except me. My talk was only for those who have bullied me. They asked me to do some fancy shooting. I wanted to be friendly and amuse them. I didn't know it was against the rules; they did. Then that young hellion of a Birch forced a fight and tried to stab me after deciding I had him licked."

"Yes, yes. It's bad business," gloomily conceded Togy. "But you've got brains. They're unthinking hot-heads. And you be a newcomer who hasn't proved hisself. They need work. Loafing in camp makes bad blood 'tween 'em. Piper 'n' Fox will be at it next, but Piper will dodge as long as he can. They need work and blooding. But don't you talk so much. You don't have to bleat everything that comes into your head.

"You'll have to go through with young Fox. He's a relation to 'Killer' Fox, who's done some rare blood-lettin' in these parts. Young Fox wants to make a name like his uncle. And he's a bad one in a ruckus. He can cripple, even kill a man, with his bare hands. He's a master-hand at gougin' and bone-busting. If you can stand him off t'others will let you alone."

"Any one can claw and bite like a wild animal," scornfully said Porter.

"But not like Fox. Do anything but kill him and I won't say a word. Dog-gone! I was forgitting the Old Man. He wa'n't at his house. I'd thought to take you along to have you handy if he took a notion to see you. He's interested in coiners."

"Couldn't we go now?" suggested Porter.

Togy hesitated, then decided.

"All right. It ain't reg'lar. You'll have to keep back out of sight of the house till I've talked with him. He prob'ly won't see you. Don't often have a man brought to him, and then after dark as a rule. I haven't seen him for two days. Shows how close he stays by hisself. If he's r'iled I'll take a cussin'."

CHAPTER IV

ONE MAN MISSING

THE COURSE taken by Togy was due west from the bunkhouse and roughly parallel with the creek on the south side of the long, narrow opening. For almost all the way the path led through a mixed growth of white maple and ash. After five minutes of walking Togy halted and explained:

"You'll stay here till you hear me whistle. This is the Old Man's path on the few times he comes down to the bunkhouse. The regular path to the west end of Rag-Town keeps along the crick. Old Man may say he won't see you. Mebbe he's still out prowling 'round in the woods. Likes to be alone."

Porter nodded and composed himself to wait. He was curious to see the leader of the band. He had no idea whether he was along in years, or whether his title simply referred to one in command. It impressed him as being unusual for a captain of outlaws to remain aloof from his men. He could understand how, in some cases, such isolation might make for better discipline. At the least it would discourage any familiarity. He was soon aroused from his meditations by the sound of footsteps. It was now twilight, but Togy's bulk was soon discernible.

Porter asked—

"So he wouldn't see me?"

"He ain't there. I'll try ag'in this evening."

"He can't have gone far."

"How do you know how far he can go?" asked Togy impatiently. Without waiting for an answer he continued, "Sometimes he's gone for a week or two. But at such a time he lets me know. The men don't know. They always feel he's on deck. Makes it sort of hard for me."

"I'd suppose you'd get used to it,"

said Porter as they made their way toward the bunkhouse.

"Makes it hard for me," repeated Togy. "Unusually so just at this time. The men took you in, but you ain't really in till the Old Man says the word. You'll have to be more careful in your talk than as if we'd found him and he'd voted for you. Sorry 'bout that fuss with Fox. Splad 'n' Birch will be for him to lick you most mortal. Piper don't care what happens to your hide, but there's hard feeling 'tween him and Fox. Fox rides rough-footed over Piper at times."

"I don't enjoy these rows," defended Porter. "But he hunts for me. He forces a fight on me. If there's any way I can dodge it without his starting to crowd me worse than ever, I'll be glad to dodge."

"You can't back down without being called a coward," Togy said. That he was disturbed by the situation was suggested when he gathered up a handful of his black beard and gently tugged it. After a bit of silence he added, "It would be a lot better if we had the Old Man's vote."

"You couldn't tell them you have it? It's only a matter of a few hours."

"By gawdfry, Porter! You pester me! You don't mean to, but it's your cocky way of thinking everything's settled, and in your favor. No, I can't tell 'em you're took in. Might have to tell 'em in the morning that you ain't."

"If that happened, what?"

"Well, well. No use fussing over tomorrer. Just bear in mind Fox is a most dangerous, pestiferous young varmint. If you win he'll always be against you. If you lose—"

"Yes? If I lose?"

"He'll pester you something mortal."

Porter surprized and annoyed his companion by halting and laughing loudly.

"What you whickerin' 'bout?" growled Togy.

"Your cheerful words. I lose no matter how the fight goes."

"I'm still the boss, next to the Old Man. Fox will hold a grudge but he'll let you alone if you best him. That is, he will in Rag-Town."

They talked no more. Togy appeared depressed, if not actually worried. Porter assumed he was troubled about the coming conflict with Fox. He was enlightened by Togy's musing aloud:

"It ain't right. Ain't fair to me. He must 'a' been gone for three days. By Judas! High boss or low boss, I've got to have a better understanding with him!"

Ben had come up from the lookout and the five men were sprawling before the bunkhouse talking animatedly, until they perceived Togy and Porter approaching. Fox came to his feet and went indoors. Ben loudly announced—

"Now comp'ny's come we can eat."

Splad called out—

"Everything hunky-dory with the new member now?"

"Old Man was out walking. We didn't wait," gruffly answered Togy.

He entered the house, Porter at his heels. Birch was nursing a lump on his jaw as he slouched through the doorway and pretended not to see Porter. Togy was more worried than any of them knew. They would submit much to his rough discipline when it was exercised for the general good of the band. But they would be quick to resent any display of favoritism by him for a new man. And Porter's welfare was very precious to him. His imagination had reached the point where he was accepting Porter as a fountain of gold.

Togy, too, was pondering on the Old Man's absences and beginning to wonder whether he had not erred in allowing them to remain so many mysteries. Because letting himself thus be discomfited was futile, he tried to be rid of thinking about the subject. Never yet had he dared to spy direct, or by proxy, on his chief. Now that the stage was set for more trouble he essayed the good-natured rôle. With a wide grin he told Fox:

"You fellers are like pup hounds—bound to have some fun. Ben, light some more candles—we got 'em cheap."

Piper, dishing up the supper, snickered at the jest, but the others remained blank of face. Togy made another effort and told them:

"It's derned sight better to bleed each other a trifle and git the bile out of your thoughts than to go 'round Injun-hating one t'other. Fist-cuffs never hurt nobody yet. I've mauled my best friend and been mauled by him, and we kept on being friends."

Fox briskly stepped forward and, giving no heed to Porter, told Togy—

"I'm fightin' free-style, boss."

Togy had expected and feared this choice.

"Say, Fox, why don't you make it a ordinary row and call it quits? We've got 'portant work ahead of us."

"Just one thing ahead of me tonight, boss. And I'm fightin' free-style. It's my right under the camp-rule."

His voice sounded flat and reminded Porter of the ventriloquist in the Stokes' show who made a ridiculous wooden doll talk.

Piper placed the last of the food on the table and grunted—

"Why don't you try and be human for once?"

Fox wheeled on him and said:

"After I've finished with this new feller I'll take you on, Piper. You've talked brash. We don't like one t'other."

His voice, Porter now decided, was something more than flat. It made him think of a rattler's warning rather than of the trick yapping of the wooden doll. That Piper did not relish the threat was evidenced by his silence and puckered brow. Togy stared down into the thin face and read a terrible purpose in the dull gray eyes. He could only continue his attempt at joviality. He said:

"All right. Free-style. It's like you, you little cuss. Whole hog or none with you. But you two keep this in mind: This row ends here, tonight, no matter who wins. No claiming the camp right after tonight."

"It'll end here tonight, boss," promised Fox.

Then he turned to his friends and stretched his mouth in a grin.

"Then we'll eat," said Togy. He purposely held back long enough to murmur over Porter's shoulder, "Look out! He's pizen!"

As the best of supplies had been looted from houses, stores and boats, the supper was excellent. The fresh beef correctly suggested that livestock was brought in on the hoof and butchered as needed. Porter sat between Togy and Piper. He knew the men were watching him sharply in search of signs of nervousness or timidity. Splad observed he ate sparingly. He called down the table:

"Lost your hankering for victuals, Porter?"

"Bully victuals, and I'm wolf-hungry. But before a real fight I favor my stomach and don't fill up till after it's over. You'd better do the same, Fox."

Fox snarled and tore at a strip of beef. Togy endeavored to dilute the bellicose atmosphere with talk of golden profits. He pictured the new profits bringing to every man in the band a life of ease and luxury. One big successful stroke and they all could return to the river and live in towns, or on the floating palaces. The glamour of his talk caused Splad's lip to draw up and Piper's eyes to glisten. Ben remained rather dour, while Fox and Birch exchanged knowing glances. When the meal was finished Fox briskly took the middle of the floor and threw aside his coat and announced—

"I'm waiting for the gold-maker."

Togy cursed under his breath. He had great respect for the man's deadly prowess when the killing instinct was aroused. He was worried as he watched Porter's deliberation in removing his upper garments and his care in hanging them on pegs and in placing his guns on the table. He was reconciled even to losing Fox from the band. Porter did not seem to be in any haste to take the floor. This could be interpreted as a distaste for the impending struggle.

Porter turned to him and inquired—

"Free-style means *any* trick is allowed?"

"That's what it means," grunted Togy. He fingered his beard uneasily and added, "But you can't catch up a chair or any sort of a weapon, you understand. Just your feet 'n' hands."

"And teeth," monotonously supplied Fox.

Togy lost his temper and cried:

"See here, Fox. Don't try to kill a gold-mine. Make it a decent fight. One you can shake hands on after it's finished."

This appeal catered to Fox's vanity. The thin, crafty face reflected his satisfaction. In free-style fighting he was an egoist. He told Togy:

"I've lived up to the rule. Always shall. I'm in my rights. This feller can back down an' put on his store-clothes, an' there won't be any ruckus. I don't aim to kill him. Just want to make a start at takin' him apart to see what makes him so brash."

Then he turned his back and grinned at the three men behind him.

Birch's jaw still ached. But his eyes were bright with eager expectation. Splad and Ben smiled grimly. Piper, standing beside Togy, showed a troubled face. He was recalling Fox's threats against himself.

Porter, his arms hanging loosely at his sides, eyed his opponent through narrowed lids and said—

"When you get through making speeches you might try to make good on some of your silly threats."

Fox spun about. His eyes widened and the lean jaw crept forward. He came upon his toes and minced forward a step, then a step to one side, like a wild animal stalking his prey. He held up his fingers for Porter's inspection and told him:

"Mebbe I'll jab for an eye first. One eye's enough for you to work with."

"He'll fool him," whispered Splad in Ben's ear. Ben nodded and watched with mouth agape.

Porter continued in his listless pose, his hands at his side. Without shifting his gaze he called out:

"Togy, you said *any* trick goes? That means kicking?"

"Yes! Anything!" barked Togy.

Fox ceased advancing for a bit and stepped from side to side while his cunning mind endeavored to guess what new town trick the new man might possess. He lost none of his confidence, but decided it was better to take his time and run no risk. Porter watched him and lifted a hand to pat his lips as if concealing a yawn.

This show of indifference infuriated Fox to the exploding point. He leaped forward and feinted with his left hand, clawing like a cat, and then swept his right to rake his opponent's face. As Porter ducked and the curved fingers dug into his thick hair, his right fist, starting from the hip, crashed under the sharp chin, and Fox left the floor and fell on his back, a quiet heap. The gaping onlookers watched the curved digits slowly relax as if beholding a new phenomenon.

Porter rubbed the top of his head and told Togy—

"He likes me. He took away a lock of my hair."

Ben picked up a bucket of water, but before he could douse it on his friend the dull gray eyes opened. Piper excitedly advised Porter:

"Everything's fair! Give him the boots!"

But Porter stepped back and waited. Under his breath Togy murmured—

"The —— fool!"

Birch, watchful that Porter should not assault his prostrate friend, rule or no rule, kneeled and whispered for Fox to take his time. He made a pretense of bathing the aching head and soon was rewarded by seeing the fire return to the dull eyes. He whispered—

"Fetched you same's he did me. I told you to watch out."

"He didn't knock me stiff the way he did you," murmured Fox.

Piper cried:

"Jump him, you poor fool! Give him the boots! It's your right. He called for free-style."

"No. He wants me to knock him cold. Give him time. Take all the time you

need, Fox. And you need a lot of it."

Fox bounded to his feet, insane with rage. He seemed to have recovered from the blow and circled mincingly to the left, then to the right, seeking an opening through the iron fists. He was confident he would win, could he come to grips and make it a rough-and-tumble affair. Porter suddenly feinted and Fox started to kick. To his amazement and horror he felt Porter's toe catch him by the ankle; and then the sense of hopelessness as a twist and a push sent him flat on his back.

This time Porter was quick to take advantage of having his man down. He stood close with his fist ready. Fox glared up at him and began gathering himself to spring erect.

"None of that, Fox," warned Porter. "No more fooling. Say you've had enough and we'll drop it."

"Say it, you fool!" roared Togy, his mind greatly relieved by the simplicity of Fox's defeat.

"Go to ——!" yelled Fox.

With a sudden twist and a roll he had his feet beneath him and started to stand. With merciless precision the menacing fist caught him behind the ear, and this time he was senseless as he crashed to the floor.

"Done him up brown!" shrilly exclaimed Piper.

"Shut up!" thundered Togy. "Fight's over. I'll bash in the head of the man who tries to start it goin' ag'in!"

"How can it be settled until this man says he has had enough?" demanded Porter.

"You're in your rights," admitted Togy. "Yes. Settle it once for all."

They waited until Birch and cold water brought Fox to his senses. This time it was a minute after he opened his eyes before he could remember what had happened. Even then he stared stupidly. Birch kept whispering in his ear. Then the dull gray eyes were staring at Porter. The latter advanced. Birch whispered frantically. Fox closed his eyes and faintly said—

"I quit."

Porter at once stepped away and took down his garments and thrust his guns back in his belts. Piper exclaimed—

"He never got a chance to git started."

"No free-style about it," complained Splad. "Just one style. Thought you was going to use some new trick, mister, by the way you kept talking about it."

"That's what Fox thought," Porter answered. "Funny part of it is I have several I could have used."

Togy now insisted—

"The two of you shake hands and call it quits for good."

Porter promptly offered his hand. Fox hesitated, then limply did likewise, and with Birch's help got to his feet and staggered outdoors. Togy pointed to a bunk at the end of the room and informed Porter he was to sleep there. Then he hastened after Fox and Birch.

Piper whispered to Porter:

"Togy's making sure the young cuss don't come any game through the night. Give you a bunk where no one can have an excuse for passing by you."

Ben told Porter—

"If Fox could 'a' started his tricks he could 'a' done for you."

"Undoubtedly getting started is part of the game," replied Porter.

Splad announced:

"I don't believe you've got a single trick at free-style fighting. You licked Fox along of his being too watchful for something that wasn't. He expected some new-fangled business and left himself open for a smash."

"Well, it's all over," reminded Porter. "And you'll never know whether I emptied my bag of tricks or have held some back."

"Yes, siree! It's all over," Splad gravely agreed, but the twitching lip said the opposite.

The men smoked in silence. Ben and Splad exchanged glances, talking much with their eyes. Porter finished his pipe and went to his bunk. The blanket concealed the gun close to his left hand. He made a pillow of his coat and thrust the

second gun under it. Shortly after he retired Fox and Birch came in and stood by the fireplace. Piper quickly withdrew to the bunk next to Porter's. The four men by the fire talked in low tones until Togy's heavy figure filled the doorway. He stood there a few moments, staring at the four men and, without having spoken a word, retired into the darkness. Fox and Birch took the bunks nearest the fire. Splad and Ben soon followed their example.

Porter remained awake until after midnight, and then slept but poorly and was often awake. He could not correctly estimate the extent of Togy's control over the band, and he anticipated a stealthy assault in the darkness. The first gray light of the new day convinced him his fears had been unwarranted. He rose and dressed and walked softly to the door and involuntarily halted on beholding Fox at the wash-bench.

Fox nodded and gave no sign of nursing a grudge. He even indicated a box of clean towels and thoughtfully emptied and rinsed the wash-basin. He then walked away and Porter decided there was to be no feud.

Birch came out, rubbing sleepy eyes. He spoke pleasantly, and then inquired—

"When do we begin making money?"

"As soon as the man returns with the stuff I sent for."

"They must do mighty slick work in the East."

"We're clever because we have to be. Stuff that would fool folks back East twenty years ago wouldn't fool any one there now."

Birch nodded and said:

"We folks out here must be mighty backward. The silver we turn out is pretty rank after it's been passed around a bit."

"You are far behind the East when it comes to coining. The stuff put out by private banks looks as if children made it."

This brief exchange led Porter to hope all hatchets were buried. Togy came down the path from the west, where he had his small cabin, and directed Birch to take his turn as lookout as soon as he had eaten his breakfast. Fox returned from the woods and was sent to the horse-herd half a mile north of the bunkhouse with orders to search for the missing bag of silver, although Togy announced it would be time wasted, as the thief must have taken it clear of Rag-Town. Left alone with Porter, Togy told him:

"I'm trying to keep those two fellers apart for a bit. Easier to handle 'em that way than when they have their heads together."

"They acted very friendly this morning," said Porter.

"Fox don't want any more of your fighting. But he's tricky. When he gits fully het up he'd sacrifice his grandma if she stood 'tween him and gitting even. You ain't said nothing about the Old Man being away?"

"Certainly not. But didn't he return last night."

"Just come from there. He ain't been back."

Then he motioned Porter to follow him away from the house. He circled about until he was in the path he had led his companion over the preceding day. He halted and explained:

"I've got to trust somebody. I must send out some silver and you can help me git it from the hiding-place. Old Man and me do it as a rule. If any of the others helped they'd be sure to tell each other. You ain't got any one to tell. Quite a job to keep the hiding place a secret. Splad 'n' Piper will take it to the river and git rid of it for honest money and hosses. Can't send Ben, as he's a dumb-head in such business. Took down one lot and fetched back some paper counterfeits that was worse'n anything we ever turned out."

"You sell the horses to the Mormons?"

"Planning to. But we've been sending 'em down into Missouri."

"Your stuff is hard to get at?"

"Easy, if you know. If any of the boys go hunting for it they'll look for a hard place. Never can tell when a man'll bolt if he can lay his hands on a hoss-load

of money. I picked this time as they'll be eating. Won't take long and then you can eat. We'll swing south."

"Then you don't trust the men in your own band?" pressed Porter.

"Not any farther than I can sling an ox by the tail, when they think they can make a good haul. As you ain't got any friends in this outfit I can talk plain. If you had been cottoned to by the boys I'd keep my mouth shut. No hoss-herd took that bag of silver from the bunkhouse. The herders ain't got any more spunk than the Smith City men. That's why they are herders. Some one back there, stuffing his in'ards with victuals this very minute, smooched that bag. But I don't dast say so just yet."

They walked rapidly and in silence until they came to the creek. Then Togy directed:

"Cross and foller upstream slowly. I'll stick here a bit and make sure none of them is snoopin' on us."

Porter did as ordered and went upstream until the growth concealed him. He sat down and waited. After ten minutes Togy entered the growth and joined him. He reported:

"Nary a one seems to be curious. We'll soon be there."

He took the lead and walked rapidly until they came to a stretch where the path was close to the edge of the bank and with no growth intervening between it and the stream. Togy halted beside a huge weathered stump, some ten feet high, and scanned the opposite side of the creek. Satisfied no spies were lurking there, he told Porter:

"My hand is resting on our hiding-place. Kneel down where you be and carefully paw the loose clutter away."

Porter worked rapidly and uncovered an opening at the base of the stump which was large enough for a man to squirm through. The stump was a shell. He reported to Togy, who directed him to rise and watch the north bank. He could hear Togy grunt as he assumed a prostrate position before the opening. He heard him exclaim sharply, as if confronted by a poisonous serpent, and frantically scrambled back from the hole.

"What's the matter?" softly demanded Porter without shifting his gaze from the north bank.

"——'s to pay! Stuff's gone! Cleans a hound's tooth as far as I can reach," answered Togy hoarsely.

Then Porter shifted his position and beheld Togy on his knees, his eyes rolling widely.

"By —— I reckon the whole supply's gone!" he panted.

Porter dropped before the opening and crawled inside and thoroughly explored the circular space with his hands. When he thrust his head through the hole he was startled to find his face within a few inches of Togy's hairy visage.

"Well? Anything left?" huskily asked Togy.

"Nothing."

Togy stood and clutched at his beard and moaned:

"Our whole dad-burned stock! It's what we kept ahead to take out if the band bust up and we had to clear out of Rag-Town in a hurry. Four good hoss-loads!"

He became silent and glared malevolently in the direction of the Old Man's cabin.

"Who could have taken it—so much—without you knowing it?" asked Porter.

"The Old Man, —— him! Cover the hole careful like. Yes, he done it. Keep shut while I try to think."

He bowed his head and pondered over the situation for a minute. Then he was tersely explaining and commanding:

"Porter, your life and mine won't be worth a shoot of powder if the men at the bunkhouse know about this. They'll rub you out along of two of them already hankering to see the color of your blood. They'll drop me from behind along of reckoning I'm in the game with the Old Man to quit Rag-Town and leave 'em flat."

"They can't know about it unless you tell them," said Porter.

"They'd have to know it soon. I must fetch him and the stuff back."

"You can find him?"

"I don't know. But soon after I come back from a little trip he'll be trailing after me."

"Doesn't make sense," said Porter.

"I've told you more'n I ever reckoned to tell any man in Rag-Town. I've talked free, because there isn't a man you'll tell secrets to. I look on you as I would a dumb man. You're in a corner. Two fellers would laff if you was rubbed out. Others don't care what happens to you unless you make some coins mighty soon after the stuff's brought back from St. Louis. I'd never fetched you here if it wa'n't for the coins. You depend on me for being alive each day. You'll play my game—no other for you to play. And you'll make a profit by doing it. Now we'll eat and I'll start working. Got to work mighty fast."

"What can you do?" asked Porter as they hurried down the bank.

"I'll tell the boys I'm leaving to join the Old Man on a business trip. Mighty seldom we're both away at the same time. I'll have to take Splad along. I can trust him s'long's I have him with me. I'll be back inside of forty-eight hours. Try to keep your hide whole till then."

Porter frowned and insisted:

"See here, Togy. I don't like the notion of staying here to be caught holding the bag if you failed to return."

"——! Think I'd bother with you for a second if it wa'n't for the rare parcel of gold pieces you're to turn out? And think I'd quit you s'long's you can do that? Think I'd quit Rag-Town without even any silver to take with me? Why, I'd come back for the gold if I had to wade through —— to git here."

"You seem mighty sure the Old Man will return."

"I know he'll return," grimly insisted Togy. "Here's the house, and I'll be giving orders. The men mustn't think there's anything unusual 'bout my going away. Just reg'lar business."

They walked leisurely across the open ground to the house. On entering the long room Togy began bolting his breakfast, and between mouthfuls he explained:

"Old Man's going outside on a bit of business. Already started. Wants two of us to foller 'n' overtake him. No silver will be started to the river till we git back. Will be gone two days, mebbe. Splad, fetch three hosses and be smart. You'll ride with me. If you fellers want to go to Smith City you can take two days, 'less I call you back sooner. If a posse jumps you don't lead it here. Make up north. Some of you drop in on Birch and tell him he's free like the rest of you."

"We'll shoot —— out of any posse that shows up," said Fox.

"Not 'less you want to answer to me. You scoot to the north. Porter can stick here and keep camp. Where's Piper?"

No one knew, but while they were talking and Splad was starting for the horses he came riding around the end of the building. As he slid from the saddle he called through the doorway—

"Just met a herder on his way here to tell you that four of the best hosses is gone!"

Togy's beard seem to writhe; yet he chuckled as if amused and quickly explained—

"Old Man took them to fetch back some likely stuff."

Splad came up with the three horses and Togy swung into the saddle and warned:

"Every one be careful in having some fun. No rows, no bedevilin' Smith City. Come along, Splad. We'll overtake the Old Man."

The men welcomed a holiday at Smith City. They were beginning their departure even as Togy, still within hearing, loudly called back for any new horses brought in to be pastured half-way between the bunkhouse and the herd in the north. Porter could not discover any suggestion of suspicion in any man. Fox was so eager to be gone that he started forthwith and without waiting for his

companions. Piper stared after him and confided to Porter:

"Once he 'n' Birch 'n' Ben strike Smith City there'll be some lively times. You'll be sort of lonesome here. Wish you could go with us."

"I know no one there. Good time for me to look about for the right kind of clay I'll be wanting to use. Take a drink for me."

Piper hesitated, with a foot in the stirrup, and mused:

"I dunno, Fox may git ruckious down there. He don't like me. I don't like him. Still, there's rare fun at Smith's."

"It's a holiday. Fox won't bother you."

"Oh, don't git the idee any one in this outfit can scare Jed Piper, mister. Course I'm going. I'm free born 'n' white. If any one hones to fetch me a war he'll be most tarnation sorry."

But he withdrew his foot from the stirrup and ran into the house to secure his rifle, knife and a long pistol before riding away. Nor did he take the course followed by the others, but rode due east.

PORTER welcomed his loneliness. It afforded an opportunity for looking about, and his curiosity was considerable. He already had learned none of the men, with the exception of Togy, went to the Old Man's cabin unless sent for. He had a great desire to inspect the house. Togy's cabin, a few minutes' walk from the bunkhouse, interested him but little. The Old Man's studied aloofness, however, challenged investigation. But topmost in his thoughts was Togy's confidence that the Old Man would follow him back to Rag-Town. Either Togy intended to bolt, and had made his talk as a blind, or the answer to the puzzle would prove most interesting.

Togy frankly had confessed he did not know where to find the captain of the band, and had plainly intimated he should not search widely for him. Porter was baffled in his attempt to understand how the Old Man could know his lieutenant had followed him if the two did not meet. He put it away in the back of his mind while he surveyed what was openly paraded before him.

He remained in and about the bunkhouse until midday, when he was satisfied none of the men, for any reason, would return. Then he started along the north path for the Old Man's house. When he came to Togy's cabin he found the door open. He paused for a moment but decided not to enter. The room, so much as he could see of it, appeared to be empty except for the bunk, some clothing, several guns and a saddle. Fuel was ready by the fireplace, but there were no dishes to indicate the tenant ever did any cooking.

Across the room and in line with the open door was a window. As Porter's idle gaze happened to sweep across this he caught the motion of something in the timber a few rods from the window. He was startled, as he had believed he had Rag-Town to himself. And yet he had seen nothing beyond a low hanging bough slightly agitated. A squirrel leaping from branch to branch might have shaken the tree-limb. There was no breeze, or he could have credited the motion to the wind. Reason urged him to saunter into the grove and thoroughly satisfy himself he was alone. Imagination insisted he abandon his purpose of visiting the Old Man's cabin. He turned at right angles and walked to the south to pick up the route Togy had taken in visiting the secret cache.

Several times he was impelled to halt behind a thick cover and study his back track. He considered this to be a weakness and was ashamed of it. But having once surrendered, he left the door open for disturbing vagaries to enter. He felt as if he were being watched.

He endeavored to prove the fallacy of this notion to the sentinel in his brain. The case he presented was unsatisfactory, for he concluded by believing he was being spied upon, even while whispering to himself there was no human being nearer than Smith City. Suddenly he found himself entertaining a new theory to

satisfy his growing sense of uneasiness. He told himself:

"Why not the Old Man spying on his men? Togy's in it with him, or is away on a fool's errand."

The hollow stump was empty. There was no play-acting in Togy's discomposure over the missing silver. There was no doubt as to the genuineness of Togy's chagrin at finding the Old Man absent after several visits to his cabin.

On reaching the creek he crossed and followed it upstream. A low-hanging branch had moved, and his imagination was responsible for the rest. He would believe this to be the truth. Yet if he were being spied upon he would be found searching for clay.

He whistled a lively tune as he arrived at the big stump. He was whistling while he removed his coat and waistcoat and belt of weapons. He pulled off his boots and, taking his knife, went down the bank and hunted for clay. He found a white clay and started to cut into it with his knife. Again the sensation of being watched swept over him. Only now he felt the unseen eyes were very close. He was working ankle-deep in the water, with his head below the top of the bank. It required a great effort for him to maintain his position. He whistled softly, and all the while could feel unseen eyes watching for him to reappear. His mind, still striving to find an explanation, now suggested that Togy had secretly instructed one of the men to watch him. He straightened up with his head and shoulders above the bank and said quietly:

"I see you. You don't have to hide."

To his great amazement there was a rustling and the sound of steps and then Fox stepped into view. A curious smile was gashing his narrow face. Recovering from his surprize, Porter said:

"Togy told you to see I didn't run away. You can tell him you watched me while I hunted for clay—and found clay."

And he held up a large chunk of clay. But Fox did not speak. The smile became a snarl. As Porter stared and waited he saw a hand closing over the butt of a pistol. Then Fox spoke, saying:

"I'll tell Togy I couldn't find you—that you skipped out—if I tell him anything. Prob'ly will keep my mouth shet, as nobody knows I'm here."

"Well, of all the queer—"

Porter hurled the clay and dropped below the bank half a second before the pistol exploded. The bullet whistled close to his head; and the clay struck the assassin's forehead. Fox screamed like a wildcat and jumped down the bank, his knife drawn. Porter had left his knife sticking in the bank and had no time to recover it.

As Fox landed on him he fell off his right side, and with his left hand caught the plunging arm and deflected the stabbing blow so that the blade sank to the hilt in the bank. With his left arm around Porter's neck Fox endeavored to gouge with his fingers. With a wild shout Porter stretched his neck and turned his face aside, and with a mighty effort turned his assailant on his back and caused him to release his grip on the knife. The next moment they were rolling into the creek.

They went under, Fox fighting like a maniac to break loose and get back to the knife. They came to the surface with Fox still striving to blind Porter. Maintaining his hold on the right hand, Porter released his grip on the left and attempted to use his fist. Fox ducked his head and shot over his left hand, two fingers extended, and stabbed at Porter's eyes. Porter ducked and received the thrust on the side of his head. Instantly he essayed another blow, striking blindly, and this time he felt the impact of bone and flesh against his knuckles. He released his grip on the right hand and struck again, and missed, and discovered Fox was reeling, waist-deep, in an effort to keep his feet.

Fox was now closer than Porter to the shore, and instead of renewing the conflict with his bare hands he scrambled to the bank and began ascending it on his hands and knees to secure the knife. As

his hand gripped and yanked the weapon clear he screeched in triumph. But Porter had him by the ankle. Fox squirmed and thrust, but the hand was not there and the ankle was free, while once more the knife-wrist was imprisoned. Instantly the knife was shifted to the free hand, which as quickly was caught and held.

Fox attempted to use his knees and found himself violently pulled forward and downward with the knife-hand pinned to the ground. The violent pull and the slope of the bank accelerated his plunge toward the water. He fell on his face and attempted to cry out; then he was silent.

"No more devil-tricks with me!" hoarsely panted Porter as he crouched and drew back his fist the second Fox should lift his head.

But Fox was making no fight. Porter's eyes dilated as he beheld the thread of crimson seeping from under the man's head. With a heave of his shoulders Porter rolled the man over on his back. Fox stared blankly at the sky; his hand still gripped the knife he had fallen upon.

"He killed himself!" gasped Porter. The sound of his own voice startled him. He gazed up and down the creek. He and the dead man were alone. "He trailed me to kill me—and he's dead," Porter told himself in a whisper.

Birds and squirrels were gossiping in the growth, oblivious to the tragedy. Porter's first thought was to secure a horse from the herd and in a roundabout way make for the river. This thought was only the result of mental flurry, however. He soon was able to analyze the situation: Fox had planned the murder from the moment he found himself whipped. He had started alone for Smith City so that none would know of his return. He had come alone. If all traces of their meeting could be concealed—Porter stared at the body and then at the creek. A hiding-place, if but a temporary one, must be found. The creek would not answer.

His desperate gaze rested on the big stump. Only the Old Man and Togy knew it was hollow. It would never answer if the captain and his lieutenant were to return before night. With them gone for two days at the least, perhaps three, it would answer perfectly. The rest of the band would remain in Smith City until called back.

"Until I find another place," Porter muttered.

Without further loss of time he dragged the limp form to the stump and uncovered the opening. Without giving his nerves time to wince he crawled inside and dragged his secret after him. Emerging, he carefully concealed the entrance and buried the knife and pistol under the nearest rock. Then he spent time in effacing all signs of the struggle on the bank.

Then he took time to examine his own person. He could find no blood-stains. He had no fear of finding any one at the bunkhouse, but if he did he could explain his wet trousers by an accidental wetting while hunting for clay. Yet if by some unforeseen chance Fox were discovered, his sodden clothing might be associated with the wet trousers. This line of reasoning brought Porter to a solution. He would halt at Togy's cabin and dry his trousers.

He gathered several samples of clay and put on his shoes and, with his garments and belt of weapons over his arm, he lost no time in gaining Togy's house.

He kindled a blaze in the fireplace and put on a pair of Togy's trousers and hung his own to dry. Too nervous to remain in the room, he went outside and spied on the bunkhouse. No one was there. He returned to Togy's cabin and in passing along the north side of it was startled by a squirrel scampering from beneath the bottom log. The downward glance led to a closer scrutiny. The log, instead of extending the full length of the cabin, was pieced out by a short section. With logs so plenty this did not seem to be practical. After further inspection he inserted his knife blade in the thin crevice and had no difficulty in removing the short section.

Porter thrust in his arm and his fingers encountered a buckskin bag. He drew it forth and examined the contents. It contained the coins he had given Togy. He explored further and found a much larger bag. A glance revealed that this was filled with counterfeit silver dollars. And he recalled the theft of a bag of silver dollars from the bunkhouse.

The fallacy of honor among thieves was again established. He returned the bags to the hiding place and entered the cabin. As he had expected, he found a trap under the bunk that opened into the cavity. Togy had two accesses to his secret cache.

He worked over the trousers until satisfied with their appearance. Putting them on, he went back to the short log and secured the two bags. The smaller one he buried at the foot of a tree. He had intended to hide the bag of silver there also, but found it would necessitate the digging of too large a hole. He scouted the bunkhouse, returned to the silver and carried it down to the creek and stuffed it in beside the dead man. As a second thought he left two gold pieces with the bag.

CHAPTER V

HOSTAGE

AFTER stopping at Togy's cabin to pick up his specimens of clay, Porter went to the bunkhouse. He was depositing his clay on the ground beside the door when a step inside the house threw him into a panic. He was fighting to regain an external appearance of composure as the steps came toward the door.

"Hello, inside!" he cheerily called out.

"Howdy," called back a colorless voice, and he was much relieved to behold Piper framed in the doorway. Porter greeted him, and his show of surprize was genuine, "I thought you were in Smith City."

"No fun for me in Smith City," moodily replied Piper. "Fun for others, but not for me."

"Sounds rather blind. When did you get here?"

"Ten minutes ago. I was starting some grub. Blind? Plain enough if you remember Fox." Piper's voice now was taking on an edge and his eyes were glowing with hatred. "Every time he gits snootful of red licker he remembers he's got a grudge ag'in' me. I reckoned I'd go to Smith City and if he got brash I'd settle it once for all."

"You've had a fight with Fox!" exclaimed Porter. "Hope you bested him."

"I ain't had no fight with any one," corrected Piper. "After chawin' it over I see I'd not only have to kill him or be manhandled most awful, but I'd have to kill Birch as well. Mebbe Ben. The three was too big a mouthful to bite off. Fox is worse'n an Injun at holding a grudge."

"Why, I didn't suppose he was like that. He acted real friendly with me this morning. Didn't seem to be fretting over last night's tussle."

"Huh!" And Piper grinned sardonically. "You want to peel your eyes, Porter. And keep 'em peeled. You don't know that feller. He'll be sweet as 'lasses while he's watching for a chance to whittle your ribs. I ain't scared of him, y'understand. But so long's we're throwing in together, and Togy's away, we didn't ought to row it."

"Certainly not. And very sensible of you, Piper."

"When Togy's along he keeps in bounds. As he wa'n't along I turned back."

"I won't make any bones of telling Togy that Fox isn't the kind of a man for Rag-Town," said Porter. "I'd think he'd get on Togy's nerves."

"He does. Togy would 'a' done for him afore now, but in some kinds of work Fox can't be beat. Such like as walking into a place alone and gitting away with the money at the p'int of a pistol. Take him when he finds a big game going on, with the boat tied up, and the way he'll go through a room full of gamblers is a caution. And a Mississippi gambler ain't no slouch!"

"I'll say not. You were wise to come back and avoid any trouble."

"By this time," Piper continued, "he'll

be making it lively in Smith City. Cutts and t'others will hide in the bush till he leaves."

They talked aimlessly as Piper set about cooking an early supper. Porter was immensely relieved to believe Piper knew nothing of Fox's return to the camp, and yet the man's presence threatened to become something more than a nuisance. It would require great adroitness to keep away from him long enough to find a new hiding place and rob the big stump of its gruesome tenant. As it was useless to make any efforts in the evening and as dusk was all but upon them, Porter kept to the bunkhouse. The two turned in early.

While they were eating breakfast two men rode in with five stolen horses. The newcomers glared suspiciously at Porter until Piper introduced him as the "king of all coiners," and explained that Togy brought him to Rag-Town and vouched for him. Porter repeated Togy's orders for pasturing the horses midway between the bunkhouse and the north herd and invited them to light and eat. Their demeanor now was servile and after eating they rode on. Piper sat in the doorway, moodily smoking, while Porter by the wash-bench experimented with the clay.

Piper became mildly interested and asked—

"The kind you need for your work, I reckon."

Porter shook his head and said:

"Almost, but not quite. I'm disappointed. I thought it would answer when I fetched it here. Not quite fine enough."

Piper offered to go with him in search of more samples. Porter was agreeable and led the way to the path passing by Togy's cabin. Piper developed uneasiness, and when the cabin was reached and Porter would have kept on, he halted and warned—

"Can't go farther along this trail."

"Why? What's wrong with it?"

"Leads to the Old Man's house. Sheer off."

"Private path, eh? Live and learn. Still, he isn't here."

But Piper was not to be tempted.

"He's always here," he warned. "Orders is orders. Even Fox won't come farther along this trail."

Porter turned aside and, being unwilling to venture near the big stump, their search ended in failure. They were back at the bunkhouse by midday, and had cooked and were beginning to eat their dinner when Piper dropped his knife and reached for his rifle, whispering—

"Some one's coming!"

Porter drew a gun and kept it in his lap below the table and said:

"More than one. I hear voices."

Piper cautiously peered from the window and then leaned his rifle against the wall and exclaimed:

"If it ain't Birch 'n' Ben! Now why do they quit Smith City before they have to?"

Porter belted his gun and went to the door; he waved his hand and called out:

"Just in time for grub. You're back early. Where's Fox?"

"Yeah, where's Fox!" grumbled Ben as he dismounted and removed the saddle and left his horse to graze.

"Ain't Fox here?" asked Birch. "We ain't seen hide nor hair of him since he started from this house for Smith City."

"No one here but Piper."

"Piper? Queer Fox ain't here."

"Birch wouldn't stay without Fox. I wouldn't stay alone. Fun's sp'iled," complained Ben as he entered the house.

After unsaddling, Birch came in. He said:

"Not a sign of Fox since he set off alone for the Gateway. Yesterday we reckoned he'd gone courtin' some Smith City gal. We waited till this morning for him to show up. Then we asked questions. We couldn't find a person in Smith City who'd seen him at all."

"Why, that's queer. Piper, wasn't you telling me last evening you quit the settlement to keep away from Fox, who was making things lively?"

"Now, Porter, I didn't say no such thing," warmly denied Piper. "I said I didn't want to risk a row with Fox

after he'd been drinking, and that I turned back. I never entered the settlement at all."

Birch stared at him thoughtfully, and then glanced at Ben. Then he told Piper:

"We didn't see you there. But as we was denned up with cards 'n' a jug we reckoned you was 'round somewhere, at least during yesterday. This mornin' we was thinking 'bout Fox, not you. You say you didn't see anything of Fox coming or going?"

"Nosiree! S'posed he was in Smith City raising his pertic'lar kind of - —. Turned back without entering the settlement. Got here by dinner time. Fox always hankers to pick a fuss with me when his drinking gits him wild."

"Mighty queer you didn't see anythin' of him when you went toward the settlement. He didn't come by the lookout when I went there to git Birch. And you didn't travel our way, neither," said Ben slowly.

"It ain't any queerer'n that you two didn't see anything of him," insisted Piper, his voice rising to its highest pitch.

Birch said:

"He never called at the lookout. Ben 'n' me didn't see him in the settlement; none of the folks there see him, for the good reason he never reached the settlement."

"The fact you didn't see him doesn't prove he never reached the settlement," spoke up Porter. "He took a short cut and could be there ahead of you. If he had a sweetheart there, maybe he didn't want your company."

"Nosiree! He'd looked me up!" insisted Birch.

"Well, maybe some of the Smith City men didn't like his courting. Maybe they did for him. He was keen to be off and go it alone. He wouldn't even spare time to swing down and join you two at the lookout. Seems to be a case where neither of you three men saw him after he started from this bunkhouse yesterday morning."

"No man in Smith City would dare wag a finger at Fox if he was dead drunk," insisted Birch, and again his gaze became riveted on Piper. "Ben 'n' me was together all the time."

"And Piper says he went as far as the settlement, then changed his mind and come back here without seeing Fox," added Ben. "Seems he didn't wait to see if Fox was drunk or sober, good natur'd or ugly."

"What'n —— you two trying to git at?" shrilly demanded Piper, and his pale eyes squinted at one and then at the other.

"Well, Piper, you 'n' Fox never liked each other any to hurt," Ben reminded him.

"What of it?"

"Nothing just yet," spoke up Birch. "But we reckon it's queer that you 'n' him, taking the same course, didn't see each other. Fox never entered the settlement. He must 'a' gone somewhere. If he turned back, you was behind him. Yet you didn't see him."

"No, I never laid eyes on him after he left this bunkhouse in a tarnal hurry yesterday!" snapped Piper.

Porter again joined in the talk and suggested:

"If he didn't enter the settlement he must have gone around it, bound for the river or some other place, on some private business. He's the kind who would do whatever he took a notion to do. He didn't enter the settlement. He didn't turn back, or Piper would have seen him. He must have circled the place."

Birch shook his head and stubbornly insisted:

"He had no reason to pass 'round the settlement. And he didn't do that. And he never entered the settlement."

Porter gestured helplessly, and reminded:

"But he's somewhere. He didn't grow wings and fly off into space."

"You talk more like po'try then common-sense," muttered Ben. "Ever stop to think that Fox may be dead?"

Porter's low exclamation of surprize was genuine. He had not expected the

man's disappearance to prompt such a gruesome conjecture thus early.

"Dead?" he repeated in a low voice. "But why? How? He had his health when he hurried away yesterday."

"And he had enemies," added Ben, rising.

Birch got on his feet and said:

"We don't just know the why or the how. But if he's dead, then some one killed him.

His gaze flickered aside to rest on Piper. Then the two went outdoors.

Piper sensed danger. He glared after the two men and whispered:

"—— em! They say, as open as they dast, that I done for that young hound. There's been times I'd 'a' liked to done for him, brown 'n' proper. But, Porter, may I never steal any more freight from a river-boat if I ain't told the truth, the whole truth and Gawd's truth, too!"

"Piper, I believe you. Those men talk silly. Man goes into the bush in a hurry. Shows he wants to get away and be alone. Two of his friends come in and say they haven't seen him; therefore he must be dead—murdered. They keep hinting you killed him. All bosh!"

"Much obleeged, Porter. Make that talk to Togy when he gits back. And, Porter, I'll be honest. I'm thinking that along with Ben 'n' Birch that some thing as bad as a last sickness has fastened on to Fox. Them two now just went out to look for him, dead. I'm thinking that's 'bout the way he'll be found."

Porter studied him furtively, half fearing here was a double-meaning in the prophecy; but Piper's face was expressionless except for the puckered brow and worried eyes.

"Fox will turn up in good time," said Porter. "I'm off to look for clay. Come along?"

Piper lounged to the doorway and slowly swept his gaze over the surrounding cover. Then he shook his head in refusal. As if afraid of being heard, he advanced close to Porter and whispered:

"It'll be lonesome here. I'd like to go most mortal with you. They want me to come out. But I won't die in the woods and have no one ever know what's happened. I'm sticking between these four walls till Togy gits back."

"You fear those two men as much as that?" asked Porter.

"If it was Ben alone I'd snap my fingers under his nose. But I know Birch."

"Then I may not be safe. I've fought with both Birch and Fox."

"Good land! Why should you talk like a simple? Your trouble with 'em flared up here and was settled. Their grudge ag'in' me is like a fire eatin' through the inside of rotten log. Just a smell of smoke now 'n' then to show it. I wish I was free as you be. Just for sixty minutes!"

"You mean you'd quit?"

"I'd light out so fast you'd think I'd never been here."

"Why, man! You really believe they plan to murder you?" demanded Porter.

"Most sartain, if they can catch me in a lonesome place. Birch will do it quicker'n scat if he gets me out alone. Just the same as they think I done for Fox."

"Then stay here by all means. I shall not be gone long," advised Porter.

He left the bunkhouse and struck into the woods north of the building and whistled tunefully as he swung along. His first halt was at a little run, dry, and half filled with last year's leaves. He kicked the layer of leaves aside and excavated the soil with his knife.

"What luck?" asked a voice behind him.

Without changing his position, but with his back feeling cold, he answered:

"No luck. I must look farther."

He heard steps as he gave a final thrust with the knife; then Ben and Birch were standing in front of him and idly watching him as he cleaned the dirt from the blade. He could detect no hostility in their bearing. They waited until he finished with the knife and stood erect, when Birch announced:

"Ben 'n' me are sartain Piper rubbed out Fox."

"I don't believe it."

"You're a newcomer," said Birch patiently. "You don't know Piper nor the rest of us. There's been bad blood 'tween them two fellers for some time. It's Togy who's kept 'em from chawin' at each other's throats. He oughter taken Piper and left Splad."

"I wish he had. Not that I have any idea Piper is the cause for Fox's disappearance. Piper was thoroughly calm and at his ease when he came in yesterday," argued Porter. "If he'd just killed a man wouldn't he have shown something?"

"He'd be plumb happy if he'd killed Fox," promptly declared Ben.

"But he wasn't happy. He was peevish because his holiday was spoiled. He was afraid to stay and meet Fox. He was scared of Fox. He was glum and sour."

"You're too new to size up this outfit," grumbled Birch. "I s'pose you'd heard a gun if one was fired."

"No gun was fired."

"He never tackled Fox with a knife," spoke up Ben.

"Not 'less he could jump him from behind," Birch agreed. "If no gun was heard then it must 'a' happened close to Smith City. Well, let's be going back."

"Just a minute, boys," said Porter. "Togy will be back any time now. Don't go bothering Piper while he's away."

"Go to —— with your don'ts, mister," growled Birch.

Ben, less irritable, said:

"We ain't planned to reckon with Piper till Togy gits back. Of course if we find Fox's body we'll git busy at once."

"I understand it's none of my business. And you two please understand I'm not interested in your rows except when it means this band will break up and I must take my gold-making somewhere else."

"If Fox is dead and I find his killer all the gold that ever was can't hold me back," Birch grimly announced.

They left him and he could hear them talking as they made for the bunkhouse. Satisfied they were not interested in him, he walked down to the creek and to the big stump. His secret, rather the fear of discovery, weighed heavily upon him. The unexpected return of the three men brought all his plans to a halt. Under the best of conditions it would be a terrible task to keep the disappearance of Fox a mystery. Now it seemed to be an impossible one. His visit to the stump had been without purpose. It had been made despite great repugnance. He almost feared the silent tenant was drawing him there against his will. Satisfied that no wild life had uncovered the entrance to the cavity, he passed on up the creek.

He did not believe he was being watched, yet he pretended to be searching for clay. He came to where the creek narrowed to a few feet in width and discovered on the opposite side a path that led north over rising ground. Leaping the stream, he rapidly followed this, and in a few minutes found himself at the back of a long log cabin, fully as large as the bunkhouse. Close by was a large corral. A shed joined the house. He knew it must be the Old Man's house; and without any hesitation he passed through the corral to a door opening into the shed and entered.

A door opened into the house. In a corner of the shed was a heap of débris containing a large number of broken molds. One of these was of iron, made in two pieces which could be clamped together, with an opening through which molten metal could be poured. From what little was left of the clay matrix he decided it had been used for counterfeiting half-dollars or the old five-dollar gold piece, the two being about the same size.

The door of the house was unlocked and he entered. The windows were small and without glass but were heavily barred with oak. A pile of blankets in the corner served for a bed. Pinned to the wall over this pallet was a page torn from the *Counterfeit Detector* published in Cincinnati. Porter smiled at the irony of the Old Man's finding helpful hints in the publication intended to prevent the making and circulation of bogus money.

At the other end of the room was a

long, roughly made work-bench. Several molds, all for silver dollars, and a quantity of lead containing a small amount of silver, were on the bench. These, in Porter's estimation, testified to crude work. A solution of silver nitrate and some copper coins suggested at least an attempt to plate the baser metal with silver. In a box were several counterfeit bank-notes, and the work on these was very crude. Porter believed, however, they would pass more easily than the coins, as the genuine usually were slovenly done. With wildcat currency easily attributed to fictitious banks, Porter could not understand why the making of paper money had been abandoned for silver. Then, lodged between the logs back of the bench, he found a sample of the silver money he knew they must be turning out, and his brows crawled upward. It was far better work than he would have credited to any counterfeiter along the river. He paid tribute to it by murmuring—

"It would fool most of them in the East."

It was four horse-loads of this kind of stuff the Old Man had taken away, according to Togy. Porter paused in his examination of the bench and stared about the long room. He was overwhelmingly impressed with the belief the Old Man never intended to return to Rag-Town and had deserted the band.

The room darkened and the rain beat on the roof. Surveying the front of the house through the small windows to make sure he was the only trespasser, he retired as he had entered and hastened down the path to the creek. The growth was gloomy and he had a strange disinclination to pass the big stump. The storm developed into a downpour as he emerged from the timber and raced for the bunk-house. As he hurried through the doorway he came upon Ben seated by the fireplace, a rifle across his knees. It required a second glance to discover Piper. He was sitting on his bunk and whittling long, curly shavings from a stick with his big knife.

"Where's Birch?" asked Porter as he hung his coat and waistcoat up to dry.

Without changing his position Ben replied:

"Smith City. Dogs."

"Dogs?"

"Hounds to hunt for Fox's body."

Porter winced, then regained his composure as he caught the violent tattoo of the rain. He said—

"I don't believe the dogs will find anything unless it's Fox's trail making for the river."

In a squeaking falsetto Piper passionately cried:

"All the dogs this side of Tophet can't never prove I had a mortal fight with Fox." Then in a crescendo of wailing complaint he added, "One man goes for dogs. T'other stays here to see I don't run for it. If I wa'n't as innercent as a baby I'd quit this place and no man could stop me!"

Ben stared venomously down the room and sullenly challenged:

"Try it. See how far you can budge afore a hunk of lead catches up with you."

"Two can hand out lead pills," said Piper.

"Both of you are talking nonsense," said Porter. "No fighting while Togy's away. This rain will stop the dogs from working."

"Some more of your—don'ts!" wrathfully exclaimed Ben. "You keep it up and I'll bust loose and fetch you a man's fight. Fox was done for 'tween here 'n' Smith City, nearer Smith's than here, or you'd heard guns. Birch will have time to work the dogs afore the trail is fouled by the rain. He went hoss-back. Storm's from the west. They've got rare dogs at the Gateway. By this time they've found Fox, most likely."

Piper ceased whittling and stepped to the window and held the long knife like a rapier as he looked out at the storm. In high pitched vehemence he suddenly cried:

"By gawdfry! I ain't going to wait here to be butchered like a beef critter—butchered just along of your fool notions! You two men plan to wipe me out whether

Fox is found or ain't. I never done it, and I won't stick to pay the price!"

Ben shifted the rifle a bit and warned—

"She's loaded for b'ar—or skunk."

Piper glared like a trapped animal. Before he could more than make a move he would be shot down in his tracks. Porter studied the tableau and quickly considered the entire situation. Fox would be found. Piper surely would be killed. It would be infinitely better for him and Piper if the latter should hurriedly leave Rag-Town. He changed his position and doubled his arms and stretched them full length and yawned. But as his left hand dropped heavily to his side his right lingered long enough to draw a revolver from his belt hanging on a peg. He examined the weapon critically and cocked it. Ben heard the hammer go back and turned his head.

Still examining the gun Porter told Ben—

"I believe it will be better for every one if Piper goes away and stays away until Togy returns."

"If he makes a move I'll nail him dead center!" cried Ben.

"Take your hand off that gun, Ben. Piper, you can go or stay."

Ben filched a quick glance. Porter stood with arms folded, the cocked revolver needing but the slightest elevation to cover him.

"Keep the drop on him!" squeaked Piper. "I'm going. Dogs may 'a' found Fox by this time, if he's dead. I'm innercent. I won't be killed for anything that's happened to Fox."

As he spoke he sidled up the room toward the door, his gaze riveted on Ben. He reached the door and snatched up his rifle and leaped out into the rain.

The tableau at the fireplace persisted. Without turning his head, Ben bitterly denounced:

"You've let a bloody murderer git clear, mister. You'll answer for it."

"There's no proof of any killing. I'll answer to Togy, but not to you or Birch."

"You ain't even a member of this outfit yet!"

"I'm the smartest pistol shot on the Mississippi and know more about coining than the whole river."

"If you could turn corn bread into di'mon's you couldn't stand 'tween poor Fox's murderer and justice without paying the whole price," insisted Ben.

"Time enough to talk payment when we find something is owed. Piper is nothing to me. I'd give you the same show if you stood in his shoes."

"What riles me is for you to take it on yourself to give any one a show," Ben bitterly replied. "It would be brash enough if you belonged."

"What I've done, I've done. Togy will decide if I've done the right thing."

A horseman before the door caused them to face in that direction. Birch was dismounting. Two gaunt dogs were with him. Removing his saddle, he brought it inside, followed by the dogs. Porter asked—

"What luck?"

"Found the trail near Smith City where it turned back and started toward this camp. Then the rain got so heavy the critters couldn't work. Where's Piper?"

"Piper's dusted. I'd 'a' stopped him, but this man held a gun on me," Ben replied bitterly.

Birch dropped his saddle and his hand closed over the pistol in his belt.

"Porter, you done that?" he slowly asked.

Porter, his arms still loosely folded, stepped back so as to have both men before him and replied:

"Yes. You can't kill a man on a silly suspicion. I'm positive Piper never saw Fox from the time Fox started from this house, alone, for Smith City. If dead, there's no proof Piper killed him. Some one in the settlement may have attacked him from behind. There's no evidence he is dead. You'd have some mighty tall explaining to make to Togy if he came back and found Piper dead."

Birch hesitated. To draw and discharge the pistol would require a fraction of a second, and the pistol, because of the rain, might miss fire. More compelling

was the belief the cocked revolver would end his career before he could get the weapon clear of the belt.

Porter said:

"Togy would take it even worse if he came back and found his gold mine dead. Birch, forget about it. I can drill you before you can wink an eye."

There was weight in the reminder of Togy's wrath should this new maker of gold coins be destroyed. But the revolver, limply held, the barrel pointing downward, was what drew Birch's hand away from his belt. He picked up his saddle and placed it against the wall, then straightened and in a low voice said:

"You've had your own way, Porter. You would climb into the driver's seat and take the reins. If you git smashed up in a run-away you have yourself to blame."

The two dogs came forward and sniffed curiously at Porter's legs. He pushed them aside and thrust his gun into the belt, insisting:

"I have done you two men a kindness in stopping you from killing Piper. Now I'm not going to stand guard against you two. If you want to kill me I can't stop it."

Without a word Birch took his rifle from the corner and went out. Ben quickly followed him. The dogs lingered, still interested in Porter. They seemed loath to leave him even when a shrill whistle sounded. Porter pushed them with his foot toward the door and breathed more freely when they were outside.

The rain had ceased as, from a window, he watched the two men and the dogs depart in the direction of Togy's cabin. After they disappeared he went to the wash-bench and lathered his face and hands with the yellow soap and rubbed soap on his boots. He did not believe there could be any scent on his person, and yet he would have felt more at ease could he put on new trousers, taken from the stolen clothing piled at the end of the room. He built up the fire and threw on some green branches and endeavored to stand in the smoke that seeped out at times.

IT WAS dark when Ben and Birch returned. Porter had prepared an excellent supper and the three ate heartily. Porter asked no questions and the men volunteered no information. Their downcast mien was sufficient evidence of failure, both in striking Fox's trail or in overtaking Piper. With scarcely a word to each other, and completely ignoring Porter, the two hung up their clothing to dry, tied the dogs at the end of the room and took to their bunks.

Porter smoked a pipe by the fire and wished himself elsewhere. Fox dead was troubling him more than had Fox alive. Piper would be blamed if the body was found. That it would be found ultimately he never had a doubt. The return of Piper, closely followed by Ben and Birch, had been bad enough. The unexpected arrival of the dogs made a desperate situation hopeless. He could only pray Piper would keep on traveling, thereby carrying with him a verdict of guilt. Porter winced as his mind pictured the tragic drama once Togy returned and visited the stump. The two men were snoring heavily when Porter took his two guns and sought his bunk.

The morning found Ben and Birch willing to exchange civilities with him. When Porter buckled on his belt of weapons and started for the door Birch asked—

"Where going?"

"Looking for clay."

"Reckon we'll come along."

"Good. Lonesome work hunting clay."

As the three left the house, Ben having the dogs on a leash, Birch brought along a pair of Fox's boots. Porter had no intention of leading the animals to the trails of yesterday, although the rain had, he believed, greatly minimized all danger. He turned north. Ben spoke up and reminded him:

"You've been up here once. Down on the crick is more likely."

"Got some samples from there. No good."

The men kept behind him and caused his scalp to tingle. They talked in low asides. The dogs were more encouraging; they were sleepily indifferent. After a quarter of a mile Ben expressed a curiosity as to the technique of coloring coins to make them look like gold.

Porter regretted the lack of a fire hot enough to melt brass or brass dust with a high percentage of copper, and talked learnedly of plating plain coins with gold chloride. When he paused Birch said:

"Don't understand a word you say. Old Man does all that work here."

"He should have some stuff in his house that I could work with," said Porter.

"We don't know nothing about it," said Ben. "We ain't allowed to go there 'less we're sent for."

"Mysterious sort of man," mused Porter. "What's he look like?"

"Wait till you see him," was the gruff rejoinder.

UNTIL midday he wandered about, often pausing to dig and test the soil, and all the while the men and the dogs were behind him. Birch did not attempt to find Fox's trail by using the boots he had brought along. Porter could feel the gaze of the two watching him, and he decided he was under espionage, as if they feared he might attempt to run away. At noon they returned to the bunkhouse without any mention having been made of Piper or Fox.

After they had eaten Porter fully expected the two to accompany him, and did not know whether to be glad or disappointed when Birch announced they had had enough of clay-hunting. This time Porter started north again, but turned back after scouting his back-trail and failing to discover any signs of being followed. Against his will he ventured a visit to the creek where he remained only long enough to secure several lumps of clay. He swung around in a half circle and returned to the bunkhouse near sundown.

Ben and Birch had been drinking but were carrying their liquor well. They had the supper ready and the meal was eaten in silence after Porter failed in arousing any interest in the samples he had brought back.

Again the three retired early. Porter discovered this silent companionship and the horror of the hollow stump were working on his nerves. He slept poorly and was glad when daylight entered the small windows. As he swung his feet to the floor he was startled at beholding Splad entering the room. One hand went under his folded coat and the other under the blankets. Splad nodded to him and put aside his weapons and coat and yawned wearily.

Slipping into his clothes and buckling on his belt, Porter asked—

"Where's Togy?"

"At the Old Man's house."

"So you overtook him?"

"Nary a sign of him. But he'll be coming in soon." Splad chuckled softly as he made the prophecy.

"How do you know that?" Porter asked curiously as he walked to the fireplace.

"That's for my betters to tell," replied Splad. "Togy says for you to bolt some grub 'n' come to the Old Man's house. Take the narrer path that runs due west from here. Whose dogs be those? Who's in the bunks?"

"Smith City dogs. Birch and Ben. What's Togy want of me?"

"——! Can't he tell you that? Why those dogs here? Where's Fox 'n' Piper?"

"Fox hasn't come back. Ben and Birch think he's dead. They blamed Piper, who returned ahead of them. Scared Piper, saying he had killed Fox, and he lit out."

"Of all notions!"

"They were drinking a bit last night. They'll wake up soon and tell you all about it. They were threatening to rub Piper out, and they blame me for stopping them and giving him a chance to run for it."

"What works! Togy'll have a rare fuss over this!"

"I'm glad he's back. There's no signs

Fox has been killed—just disappeared. Been riding all night?"

Splad nodded and threw himself on the nearest bunk. Porter, wondering what it could all mean, this summons to the Old Man's house, had small appetite for breakfast, or patience for it to cook. He seized a slab of hard bread and set forth. When he reached the growth, a short distance from the bunkhouse, he discovered the two dogs were following him. There was nothing purposeful in their pursuit, for when he halted and threw sticks at them they turned back.

The path, unlike the one from the creek, brought him to the front of the house. Togy was watching for him and advanced to meet him. He said tersely:

"Got a prisoner inside. You stick here and watch till some one comes to take your place."

"Splad said you didn't find the Old Man."

"Splad had no call to talk. I didn't find him. I didn't look very hard for him. Left a writing for him to chaw on. He'll be showing up pretty soon. You won't have any trouble with the prisoner, but you keep your eyes peeled."

Togy would have started for the bunkhouse but Porter detained him by saying:

"One minute. Fox hasn't shown up. Piper came back first. Ben and Birch followed and made a noise about Fox not showing up. It ended with them saying Piper must have killed him. They talked of killing Piper. To save his hide I stood them off while he ran for it. They'll give you their side of it."

Togy stared at him vacantly for a moment, then passionately cried—

"Why didn't you use your brains and play 'em along till I got back?"

"They'd reached a point where Piper's life wasn't worth a pinch of snuff. He said he'd return once he knew you were here. He never killed Fox. Don't believe any one has killed him. Birch thinks he's dead and fetched two dogs from Smith City."

"All right. I'll handle 'em. Keep your trap shut. ——'ll be to pay if they l'arn four hoss-loads of money's gone. The one bag stolen was bad 'nough. I must keep 'em quiet till the Old Man has time to find my writing and fetches back the silver. I'll send some one to take your place mighty soon."

After Togy had disappeared in the growth Porter's curiosity sent him to one of the small windows. A face appeared between the bars. It was a small face set in a halo of fine-spun red hair. Porter stared into the wide dark eyes and saw bewilderment change to loathing. He involuntarily cried out:

"Merciful God! *You* in this place!"

"And *you!*" she whispered, her small hands clutching the bars, as her slim body swayed as if about to fall. Then she was denouncing him—

"Oh, you miserable one!"

He could make no defense. He could only mumble—

"Why did they bring you here, Miss Columbia?"

"Because, like yourself, they're miserable wretches!" she cried. "Found me alone. Perhaps *you* sent them! That's it! You did. I know it. But you shall pay! Oh, but you shall pay a rare price! Wait till Wash and Hants finds the trail!"

He felt stunned by the inexplicable situation. She drew back from the window. He managed to call after her:

"Believe what you will. But I'll get you clear of this place."

He could not see her but her voice came back to him:

"I believe what I must. You are even worse than the others."

CHAPTER VI

THE SHOW-DOWN

PORTER was sitting a few rods from the south end of the house, trying to think straight, when Togy and a herder came up the path. The herder seated himself near Porter, while Togy halted and commanded:

"You trail along with me, Porter.

We've got to clean up this mess 'bout Fox and Piper."

"You know all I know," Porter answered as he rose to accompany Togy. "What's this girl got to do with the Old Man?"

"Old Man's her pap."

"Liar! liar!" shrieked the girl from a window.

Togy wheeled and stared at the small face showing between the bars, and loudly replied:

"Mebbe a liar at times, Miss Highfalutin, but not this morning." He walked down the path with Porter at his heels. Over his shoulder he remarked:

"That gal's got a highty-tighty spirit. But I'm a master hand at taming proud ones. The Old Man fetches back that silver or trades the gal for it. I'll pay the men their share from the gold you give me."

Recovered from his amazement sufficient to speak, Porter demanded—

"You mean to tell me that young woman is the daughter of the Old Man?"

Togy paused and swung his shaggy head around, and growled—

"See here, mister, you opine to call me a liar?"

"No, no," quickly denied Porter. "But it seemed impossible."

"Why?" growled Togy. "She's got a father, ain't she? What's so queer 'bout her being the Old Man's gal?"

"Nothing. I was taken by surprize. Never expected any such a thing. The whole business seems to be so mixed up. Never came into my head how you were going to call the Old Man back to Rag-Town. It's simple enough now."

Togy stared at him balefully and said:

"You talk like a fool. But don't think I don't know what's gnawing you. She's a likely looking gal. But all women have folks—and they can't pick 'em. I found her alone at the cabin. I've skulked in the growth down on that creek enough times, waiting to git a word with the Old Man, to know the lay of the land. I found her alone and had Splad stand guard, to shoot her fool brother if he showed up while I went inside and left the writing that'll fetch her pap up here. Then I tossed her on the spare hoss. Now your case—from what I'm told you've carried a high hand while I've been away."

"I've explained what happened while you were away. It's all simple enough—"

"Never mind that now. Go to the bunkhouse and wait. I'll come along and hold court after I've been to my cabin."

Astounded and horrified by the presence of Columbia Jefferson in Rag-Town, Porter had no room for thought about his own situation. He was continually seeing the small face pressed between oak bars after he left Togy. By an effort he turned to his own predicament, once he came in sight of the bunkhouse and beheld Ben, Birch and Splad lounging on the grass near the door. As he approached the trio Birch stared at him venomously and talked out the corner of his mouth to Splad. The latter watched Porter steadily, his scarred lip drawing back. Ben grinned, as if much pleased, and hummed a river song.

Porter realized that, with the possible exception of Togy, the men were acutely hostile toward him. He nodded, and received blank stares. He entered the house and seated himself with his back to the wall and waited.

Looking through the open door, he saw the men leap to their feet before he understood the cause of their sudden activity. Then he caught it, a bellowing roar west of the building. It grew louder until he recognized the voice of Togy. The man was blaspheming terribly, insanely. Porter's hands settled on his guns. Rising to his feet and looking from a window on the west side, he glimpsed Togy emerging from the scattering timber on a run. There was no surcease to the wildly-mouthed oaths. Porter resumed his seat.

"Every one inside! Somebody's going to make a big settlement!" roared Togy as he came up to the door.

The men came into the room like frightened sheep. Behind them towered Togy, big black beard seeming to writhe as he

pressed at their heels, talking incoherently. The men grouped themselves before the fireplace and watched their leader sharply. Togy halted just inside the door and panted heavily as if exhausted. Nearly a minute he stood there, the embodiment of terrible anger, before he attempted to speak. His voice was hoarse with passion when he began:

"Devil's doin's in this place!" He paused, and Porter believed the hollow stump had betrayed him. Then Togy was continuing, "I'll cut the heart out of the man who's guilty!"

He hunched his powerful shoulders and leaned forward and scrutinized each frightened man.

Birch spoke for all when he faintly asked—

"You've found Fox?"

"No!" thundered Togy explosively. "But I'm likely to cut his throat when I do find him!"

Although, like the others, he stood in great fear of the man, Birch had his courage. He said—

"That's mighty strong talk to make 'bout a man who's likely been murdered."

"About a dog who robbed my cabin 'n' run for it!" corrected Togy.

Porter's hands relaxed and he folded his arms and drew a deep breath of relief. Birch stubbornly said:

"Fox never was that kind, boss. I don't believe he'd rob any one. The three of us here reckon Fox has been rubbed out."

Before Togy could reply Ben was timidly inquiring—

"What you been robbed of, boss?"

"Never you mind It's my savings—my share of the loot I'd turned into good money and hid away. Hid it under my cabin floor. It was there when I went away. It's gone. Fox's gone. That's the answer."

Birch gained in confidence now he realized none present was the object of the man's overwhelming wrath. He argued:

"Fox started ahead of us for Smith City. He wa'n't seen again. That is, no man will admit seeing him. Your man Porter stayed here alone. Fox couldn't come back without his seeing him. Porter says he never come back. Piper was the first man back. Ben 'n' me say Piper killed Fox. Porter let him run away. Blame Porter for letting the thief git away. Don't blame a man who's prob'ly dead this minute."

This talk made a deep impression on Togy. He advanced a few steps and bent his fierce gaze on Porter and said:

"It does seem that you've got some explaining ahead of you. It don't seem likely Fox could come back here 'n' dig under my cabin and scoot off without you seeing him. He'd have to have a hoss."

"I didn't see him," replied Porter, his hands dropping into his lap. "Of course I was out searching for clay much of the time. I came back from a trip and found Piper. Piper certainly didn't carry off any of your property when he bolted from the cabin in the rain. He was in deadly fear when he ran for it. Ben was here and saw him go. He'll tell you he carried nothing but his rifle. I've felt confident he kept going.

"But now we know some one has robbed you, that puts a different look on the whole business. Of course I can't say that Fox didn't steal back, keep low till I went clay-hunting and then got your property and made off. And I can't say that Piper didn't sneak back in the night and steal it. I only know Piper was greatly frightened when he quit, and that I did not see Fox."

"Where is Fox?" passionately broke in Birch, and the unexpected demand startled Porter.

He replied:

"I remained here and kept camp while the rest of you went off on a spree. Ask each other. After you two returned you were much in this house while I was away looking for clay."

"By——! You mean to say that either me or Ben, or the two of us, had a chance to steal from Togy 'n' used it?" screamed Birch.

"No, I'm simply reminding you two

that you were alone, near Togy's cabin, as well as I and Piper and possibly Fox."

"Hold your jaw! Both of ye!" ordered Togy. "Porter, you didn't see Piper come in. Then he might 'a' been here sometime while you was away from this house."

"That's true. He may have had time to rob your cabin and hide the loot. I only know he was afraid of being killed when he ran away, taking only his rifle. I only saw him pass through the door and into the storm. Whether he had your stuff hid in the woods and took it away with him or came back for it, I don't know. But I do know he didn't show any hankering to leave till after Ben and Birch returned and just the same as accused him of killing Fox. I believe he wanted to stick it out till you returned. He talked that way."

Togy, baffled, clawed his fingers through his beard and stared at the four men in turn, beginning with Birch and concluding with Porter. Finally he said:

"I've been robbed. Man who done it went away hoss-back. Two men are missing. Fox is named right. He's sly 'n' cunning. He didn't let hisself be seen when he come back here. Piper come in openly and showed hisself and stuck along till he was scared off. And he went afoot. Fox robbed me. Splad, you take the dogs and see if they can work. Not much chance after all this rain. Porter, you come along with me."

He passed through the doorway, followed by the angry gaze of Ben and Birch, who realized they were not trusted to work the dogs in any search for Fox. Porter overtook Togy some distance from the house. Togy at once bitterly explained:

"It's the gold you give me that's been smooched. Had it hid under the cabin. Either Piper, Fox, Ben or Birch took it. There's no gitting 'round it. Splad was with me and you're still here."

"You said the man who did it went away on horse-back, but a man wouldn't need a horse to carry away what he could take in his pockets," argued Porter. "He wouldn't need a horse to carry the gold."

"Once he'd robbed me he'd feel he needed a hoss most des'prate," grimly assured Togy. He expected Porter to say something, and the latter said:

"Piper went openly. I gave him his chance." As an afterthought he added, "If he needed a chance."

"What d'ye mean? If he needed a chance?" quickly demanded Togy.

"Either he was in mortal fear that Ben and Birch would kill him or he was playing in with them, and their threats were made to give him a reason for bolting and carrying away the coins."

"You're keen on s'posing things. Ever stop to think Ben 'n' Birch never would trust Piper to make off with my coins and then wait for them to join him and divide it three ways?"

"I don't think they would. But it was either play-acting between the three of them or else Piper was honest-to-goodness scared. Of course you know the men better than I do."

"It ain't sound. Birch would throw in with Fox, not with Piper. I reckon we'll have to count Piper out of it. The trail always swings back to Fox. He quit without nobody seeing him. I reckon my coins went when he went. He must 'a' made for the river without going near Smith City. But if he stays in the Mississippi Valley he'll pay with his worthless hide. There—that's all talked over. Now what you been doing?"

"Looking for clay. Haven't found any that just suits."

"Huh! This is a fussier job then you let on it would be when I found you down by the smoke."

"A bit slow in starting, but it'll come fast when I do start. I'll find clay by the time your man gets back with the stuff I sent for. But here's something you'll have to fix up. Neither Ben, Birch, nor Splad like me. I won't have any of them spying on me and then killing me once they're foolish enough to think they've learned my game. I must have a bench and a place to work in alone. If I had

tools I could make a bench of a sort."

"You never said nothing 'bout tools nor 'bout not being able to work in the bunkhouse. As for a bench, there's one in the Old Man's cabin."

"We could move it down to your cabin."

"No. It's too big. And I like to be alone at times. Use it there."

"Girl's in there."

"Not for long. Till she goes you can use it in the shed. Big weather-tight shed built on to the back of the cabin, you may of noticed. If it ain't light enough we can break through another winder. You'll be guarding the back of the house while working, and the girl will keep the back door locked on the inside. One of the herders can watch out front."

"And soon her father will come to take her away," added Porter.

"He'll come," was the laconic reply.

And Togy's eyes dilated and he grinned in his beard.

Porter smiled mechanically. Togy reverted to his loss and said:

"I want some more of those coins. As likely a batch as those that was took. See here, Porter. I'm honest and don't beat 'round the bush. This outfit is falling apart. I owe something to the Old Man and, by ——, I'll pay him something handsome! Then I'm going to pull out. We'll go together with a heap of the coins. We'll go now and shift the bench to the shed so's everything will be ready when the stuff comes from St. Louis."

Porter readily assented, although his mind was much troubled. The two hurried to the big house. The guard reported the girl had appeared at times at a window. Togy led the way to the rear of the house and passed through the corral into the shed and removed the improvised fastening. On entering the room, the two men beheld the Jefferson girl crouching against the opposite wall, a short knife gripped in one hand and a bar of lead in the other. Her lips were drawn back in terror and the dark eyes were wild with fear.

Togy curtly said:

"Drop that knife, you little fool!" Then to Porter, "Forgot to see if there was any weapon on the bench—drop it!"

"I'll keep this knife," she whispered. "I'll kill myself with it before I drop it!"

Togy hesitated, still obsessed by the desire of new coins to replace those stolen. He told her:

"All right. Hang on to it, then. We ain't here to pester you—just after the bench. Catch hold, Porter."

Porter felt his face burn under the girl's gaze. As he hurried toward the bench she upbraided him:

"You're the worst of the lot! The others are ignorant. You've had a chance. You've seen the world. And all you took out of life is badness. You fooled us down home. Wash 'n' me believed you was honest!"

Togy's big hand fell on Porter's shoulder and swung him about. He sharply asked:

"What's this? You two know each other?"

"I know him for the worst rascal I ever met!" cried the girl.

Porter explained—

"I was at the Jefferson cabin to rest and eat when Hawkins Taylor found me and took me back to Montrose."

"Sheriff Taylor was right. But you fooled us. We believed in you," said the girl.

Togy leered at the prisoner and agreed—

"He sartin'ly is a bad scamp, Miss Spitfire; but afore you call more hard names just kindly remember your pap's the head of this crowd up here in Rag-Town and that you belong to the same onery tribe Porter 'n' I do."

"You clumsy liar!" she panted. "You both will swing from a tree "

The beast in Togy was aroused. He turned as if to attempt wresting the knife from her hand. Porter caught his arm and swung him about and harshly reminded:

"Words aren't bullets. Your skin is as thick as mine. You want something to

trade with the Old Man for what he took away. You don't want her to kill herself. You didn't expect she would like being brought up here. Catch hold of the bench."

Togy turned to the bench and in a low voice warned:

"That'll do, Porter. Don't talk like that again to me. I'm the boss now. We'd never trust the Old Man again. I'm the boss. And when I git time I'll tame that wildcat. The Old Man robbed me; I'll rob him. And keep this in your ear, Porter, while you work in the shed. It'll be mortal bad for the man who enters this room. I'll do all the taming."

Porter bent low to secure a grip on the heavy bench and mumbled:

"Don't think I'm hankering to be within hearing of her abuse. It was you who picked the shed. I'd rather work in your cabin."

"Well, you can't. And the sooner you git to work and make good on all your talk the better it'll be for you. Splad sticks to it that you had to hide from the law and got in with us by making up a story. The boys don't believe you can do what you say."

"They would believe, if they'd seen what you've seen and lost," muttered Porter.

"Shut your trap! If I hadn't known you was sound you wouldn't be here today. But you must prove it to them. Now, up with it!"

He took a step and then dropped his end of the bench and leaped by Porter and caught the girl by the wrist as she was about to dart through the door into the shed, and sent her reeling across the room to fall on the pallet of blankets.

"You young wildcat!" he murmured, his eyes glowing. "Taming you will be a smart job, but I'm a smart man." Then he returned to the bench and helped to carry it through the doorway. The last Porter saw of the girl she was crouching on the blankets, the knife still clutched in her hand. After the door was closed and barred her voice pursued him, proclaiming him to be a cheat and a liar.

Togy grinned and said—

"She don't like you as well as she likes the man who fetched her up here. You'll be a good man to keep watch."

"He'll cheat and fool you as he has cheated and fooled other folks!" she warned.

The grin vanished and Togy eyed his companion steadily for a moment. Then he said:

"We'll go back to the bunkhouse. That wildcat's got a temper. Her pap's good natur'd most the time. But she can show her claws. Said you'd cheat me."

He became thoughtful and gave Porter a side glance.

"No question as to what she thinks of me," said Porter.

"By her talk one might think she was well acquainted, or thought she was, with you."

"I've told you all," wearily replied Porter. "I called at her cabin after dark to get food and a place to sleep. Inside of thirty minutes Taylor came and took me away, saying I killed Stacy. I had never seen her before. I've never seen her since until now. It wasn't worth mentioning as I didn't know the Old Man was her father."

"Of course. I ain't worryin'. But, Porter, keep this idee in the front of your mind: No man on the river can cheat me without dying with his boots on!"

Porter halted and angrily replied:

"Togy, no man can hear what I'm saying. If you're hinting that you're worth cheating, you're talking like a fool. What have you that I could want? You had nothing when I came to Rag-Town. I gave you a thousand dollars for the sake of finding a hiding-place. That's stolen, and the Old Man ran off with all your counterfeit silver. You have your weapons and some horses. What else have you to tempt me?"

The boldness of this speech ordinarily would have aroused the man's wrath. Now he not only recognized the truth of it but remembered that on Porter's craft he was depending to replace what he had lost. He slowly conceded:

"I don't reckon you're up to any game. I don't like the way you talked. On t'other hand the gal must a riled you a heap. We'll forgit it. For years I've lived with men who'd cut my throat for a dollar, if they'd dast take the risk of trying. Of course I know you're sound. But every time I think of the game the Old Man worked I'm mad 'nough to kill his brat back there. As for the sneakin' skunk who—"

He did not complete the threat, but motioned for Porter to walk ahead of him.

The men were lying on the grass in front of the bunkhouse. Their strained silence was evidence of an interrupted conference. Togy knew his men. After one sweeping glance he was saying:

"Old Man's coming mighty soon. Prob'ly be here by night. He knows by this time that I have his gal up here a prisoner. You fellers are going to have a new boss."

"Meaning you, Togy?" lazily asked Birch.

"Yeah."

"That suits me. But the three of us have something on our minds. We want Piper. Our notion is to go to the river and hunt for him till we find him."

"And kill him when you find him," supplied Togy. "How will that help you any?"

"It'll help us a heap. Mebbe it'll help fetch back to Rag-Town what you've lost."

Togy stroked his beard to hide a cynical smile. He compromised by saying:

"We'll wait to meet the Old Man. Piper won't leave the river."

Ben spoke up, and sullenly informed—

"We was thinking of going to the river after Piper today—to start mighty soon."

Togy's big hand closed into a fist from habit, and then opened and fell to his side. That Ben should forget the discipline he had received at the lookout eloquently testified to the agreement reached by the three men. He countered by carelessly saying:

"Go now if you want to. The trails are open. But here's something you men don't know. When the Old Man went away he took along all our supply of silver money. Four hoss-loads. That's why I fetched the gal here and left a writing for him to come and bring the money with him. I reckoned on dividing it up when he come in. If you three don't want to wait to take your share, and I should happen to be away when you come back, I s'pose I can leave it for you with Porter."

The three men came to their feet as one and glared savagely at Togy. He stood with his hands on his hips, and at his shoulder stood Porter.

Splad huskily said:

"I went with you, Togy. You never told me the Old Man had took the stuff away. I reckoned you wanted the gal and just took her."

"I took her as bait for the trap to catch the Old Man in," said Togy.

Splad glanced at his companions and read their decision. He spoke for all when he said:

"We'll let Piper slide till after the Old Man comes back. But how do you know he'll fetch the silver here?"

"His gal. The writing I left for him to read. He'll fetch it."

Ben started to speak but checked himself as Birch lifted a hand in a gesture for silence. It came clearly this time, and all heard it, the long drawn-out howl of a dog. In a choked voice Birch whispered—

"Boys, they found something!"

Togy said in a low voice—

"Down on the crick."

Porter, too, unconsciously lowered his voice and suggested—

"Chasing a rabbit or something?"

"They've found something that can't run no more," Splad told him.

Ben took the initiative, crying—

"Why do we stand here?" And he started away on a run. Birch and Splad were at his heels before he had gone a rod. Togy ordered Porter—

"You come along."

"What's the use? It may be something that sickens me to see."

"Think I'll trust myself down there

with them three fellers alone? And if I'm rubbed out how long would you last?"

Porter nodded and fell in behind him, and the two ran after the three men. Those ahead slackened their pace on reaching the creek, and Togy and Porter joined them as they struck into the path and hurried upstream. Again came the mournful howling. Porter knew the hollow stump held its secret no longer, and he steeled his nerves against what he feared he must look upon. The five were walking in a close file now. Splad called back—

"What do you reckon it is, boss?"

"Piper!" replied Togy, looking suspiciously at Ben and Birch.

"We'll soon know," muttered Birch. "But if it's Piper your friend must 'a' follered and done for him."

"Git along! Git along!" impatiently ordered Togy.

When they emerged from the path and saw the dogs at the foot of the big stump all but Porter crowded forward. He as well as Togy was quick to behold the work of the dogs in clearing away the dirt and twigs which had concealed the opening. The dogs lifted their heads again in the death-howl. Porter withdrew close to the entrance of the timber.

"I don't see as they found anything," muttered Splad, his lip working up and down.

Birch glanced along the bank and said:

"It must be in the crick."

Then Ben took notice of the excavation by the stump, and he cried—

"Inside that hole, boys!"

Ben dropped on his knees and gingerly thrust in his hand.

"I feel a boot!" he gasped.

And he made to draw back.

"Boot can't bite you! Pull it out!" ordered Togy, his voice oddly jerky.

A dog advanced his head to the hole and again howled dolefully. Ben soon completed his gruesome task. Birch leaned weakly against the stump and whispered:

"It's Fox. Ben, we was right. Piper done for him."

Splad dropped by the opening and picked up a gold coin. He held it between his thumb and finger. Togy opened his mouth to proclaim Fox a thief; then he remembered that only he and Porter knew about the stolen coins.

"Judas! Here's more stuff!" yelled Splad; and he dragged forth the bag of silver dollars.

"The money stole from the bunkhouse," mumbled Togy, his brain in a whirl as he endeavored to solve the mystery. "See if there ain't more gold in there."

"But no one's lost any gold," reminded Ben.

The stump was explored thoroughly and another gold coin was found. Togy bowed his head and grappled with the problem while the three men growled vengeance on Piper. Togy lifted his head, believing he had solved the mystery. He explained:

"Fox sneaked back to Rag-Town and got this stuff. He'd already stole the bag from the bunkhouse and hid it in the woods. He wanted to fetch it to this stump. He knew it was holler and planned to leave it here till he could git it to the river. Piper trailed him and killed him and hid the stuff and the body in the stump—"

"Hold on!" yelled Birch. "Fox had no gold pieces. No one in the band had any except Porter! No one but Porter could 'a' dropped 'em here!"

Togy knew it was his hidden bag of silver, the one he himself had stolen from the bunkhouse, that had been dragged from the stump. Now he was torn by the desire to learn the whereabouts of the rest of the gold coins he had taken from Porter, and by the upspringing in his mind of an entirely new line of suspicion. He greatly would have preferred to question Porter aside.

Something stirred in the edge of the growth. Unseen by the men, Togy drew a pistol and held it close to his leg. Porter must not be allowed a chance to talk. It meant farewell to a fortune or a fight against the three men, once they learned

the truth. The men were glaring at the leafy curtain, waiting for Porter to step into view.

With no decision left to him Togy cocked the pistol as he loudly shouted—

"Porter, step out here where we can talk this over!"

The rustling again came to their attentive ears. Togy explained—

"Said such sights made him sick."

"Then he knew what we would find," grimly decided Birch. "Guns or no guns, Porter, come out here, or we'll come after you."

He started forward and one of the dogs walked from the cover. Togy cast a startled glance at Birch and yelled:

"—— him! He quit minutes ago. 'Twas the hound we heard in there. Back to the bunkhouse!"

He led the way, running rapidly for so heavy a man.

About this time Porter was coming from the bunkhouse, carrying two rifles and a kettle of cooked meat. He ran for his life over the north path and only slowed his pace when he came to the opening where a herder was standing guard. By a great effort he controlled his voice and told the herder:

"I'm feeding the prisoner. Togy says you are to hustle to the nearest herd and fetch two horses into the growth west of the cabin. You're to keep in the timber and let no one see you. Then you are to go back and drive all the horses five miles north."

"There's trouble?" anxiously asked the man.

"Not for you if you work sharp. You know Togy. Be off."

The man ran into the timber like a scared rabbit. Porter raced to the back of the house and into the shed and attempted to open the cabin door. It was secured on the inside.

"Open the door!" he cried. "Come out and run for it!"

"I'll not open the door. I'll not come out!" Columbia answered.

"Then God help us, Miss Columbia! The gang will be here any minute!"

"I have the knife. I'll kill myself before any of you scum can get in here."

Porter heard shouting in the woods east of the cabin.

"All right, Miss Columbia," he told her, "I'm going outside to stand them off as long as I can. I'm leaving a rifle and some food by the door. Gun's one of the new Colt revolving rifles—eight shots. You'll soon get the hang of it. I did not lie to you that night in your cabin. If you can stand them off till dark and then get clear, you should find two horses hitched in the woods west of here. Get away if you can. Get killed if you can't. Good-by."

He was out of the shed and rounding the south end of the cabin when Togy, armed with a rifle, burst from the growth on the east side of the opening. With an infuriated howl Togy opened fire without pausing to take deliberate aim. Porter fired with a revolver and Togy leaped frantically to cover.

To the girl Porter called:

"Watch from the north window. Don't let them cross to the timber back of us."

A bullet from the woods clipped a corner log close to Porter's head. A shot fired from the cabin bespoke the girl's vigilance. Porter hoped the enemy would attack in force from the east, but the men's rage had not blinded them to such a suicidal extent. He watched for the inevitable circling movement south of the cabin. A gun banged in the woods and the lead whistled close. Porter quickly backed around the southwest corner of the building. Gunfire from the timber that stretched parallel to the path toward the creek was followed by hostile shots from the east. The girl fired twice from the north window. Togy was endeavoring to place a man on each side of the cabin in the hope of ending the fight.

A man darted swiftly from the woods down toward the creek and attempted to race across the opening to the growth in the west. It was a long shot and Porter did not fire until the man was within a few yards of cover. The runner

leaped into the air and did not move after he had crashed to the ground.

From the south window the girl called out:

"The back door is unfastened. Come in here!"

"Watch the north end."

Two bullets struck the logs, causing Porter to wince. The girl fired from the south window and shrilly insisted—

"Come in here!"

"But you think I'm worse than they are."

"Almost as bad. But you gave me a rifle. Hurry! hurry!"

He ran through the corral and into the shed and found the cabin door open. He entered and dropped the bar in place and darted to a window. The girl stood beside him and asked— "Can they get us?"

He glanced down into her flushed face and then resumed his scrutiny of the growth and told her:

"If they don't set us afire or hit us through the windows, we can stand them off. Keep down below the windows. One gun's good as two."

"But when it gets dark?" she whispered.

He had been fearing the dark, when Togy and his men could creep close and empty guns through the windows or start a blaze against the dry logs. He confidently assured her:

"The darkness will help us more than it will them."

Bending low, to keep beneath any bullet fired through the windows, he gained the south end of the room. The man he had shot remained as he had fallen. He could not tell which one it was.

"Only three of them left," he encouraged the girl who was at the other end of the room.

"Is your name really Porter?" she called back.

"Yes. That much is true."

"You really were in the river-show?"

"True again." He fired at something showing at the edge of the growth and in disgust exclaimed:

"Old trick. Hat on a stick."

"Why did you come to our cabin?"

"Keep your eyes on the growth. For food. A place to sleep."

"You heard what that brute said? About pap living up here, leader of these outlaws?" Her voice trembled as she asked this.

"What kind of a looking man is he?" he countered.

"Small. Very sharp eyes. Smiles a lot."

"I've been here some days. Never saw him," he replied.

"That Togy's a wonderous liar. But why did he leave a writing when he took me away?"

"Holding you for ransom, probably. I am a new man here."

"The pity of it that you ever had to come here," she groaned.

"No choice. Would you believe me if I said I was honest?"

"Don't. You've shown a wish to help me. I'm thankful for that much."

"All right, Miss Columbia. Let's leave it at that. I haven't said I was honest. But I did tell you I'd get you clear of this. Trying to make good on that. Anything stirring in the north?"

"I see nothing."

The crash of gunfire from the north proved some of the enemy were there. Porter ran the length of the room and yanked the girl to one side. He glimpsed several figures flitting among the trees. He fired on these. Several guns sounded south of the house. Porter groaned.

"You're hit?" gasped the girl.

He pushed her away from the window.

"No. But the herder will fetch no horses for us. He's brought at least two men to throw in with Togy. Three up there. Three guns south of us. At least six men."

"After dark they'll come close and shoot through the windows," she whispered.

"You'll be safe till help comes. You have a gun and food."

"You'll leave me?"

He nodded. Then said:

"You'll be all right. I must look out for myself."

"That's a lie," she softly told him. "You know they won't fire through the windows if I'm here alone. You plan to quit and draw them after you. But if you can get away after dark you can take me with you. If you can't get away you'll stay here."

"No, I can make it alone. The two of us couldn't. They have dogs. Keep back in the corner."

He ran to the south end. The besiegers opened fire from the east. Porter returned to a window facing in that direction. Again he found the girl beside him. She came to plead—

"Promise you'll stay with me."

"Go back to your window, but keep in the corner!" he ordered.

She obeyed.

The firing from the east was renewed, but the *plunk* of bullets was not confined to the logs. The oak window-bars were hit, and two bullets sang across the room and smacked in the opposite wall. Porter realized the horrible truth. Togy had ordered his men to kill the traitor even if in order to do that they killed the girl. The fire on the windows became more accurate. Lead passed between the bars at frequent intervals. Porter sat on the floor with his back to the logs. As the firing was kept up, he told the girl:

"Keep in your corner. They're up to some game."

"They try to kill us."

"They're not depending on a chance shot."

As he spoke the firing ceased and was not resumed.

The girl caught his attention. Her eyes were round with a fearful suspicion. She pointed to the door that opened into the shed. He nodded, leaned his rifle against the logs and crept softly across the floor. He condemned himself for not anticipating the ruse. The heavy firing was to hold his attention while men, who had passed to the growth in the west, could have an opportunity to enter the shed.

He rested his head on the floor, his ear to the crevice beneath the door, and caught the sound of soft steps. He rose and drew both revolvers and motioned for the girl to fire her gun into the roof. She obeyed and as the explosion of the rifle, confined to the four walls, shattered the quiet of the room Porter removed the bar and suddenly opened the door and confronted three startled men. He commenced shooting an instant ahead of them, firing with both guns. There was but the one explosive crescendo. Then he was closing and barring the door.

She screamed as she saw him reel. His knees sagged. She ran to him, her rifle cocked. Porter caught her arm and told her, "all ended—out there."

She raised the bar and opened the door and glimpsed three grotesquely sprawling figures of the banditti who would ride to loot no more.

A shrill imperative whistle sounded from the east. Porter staggered to a window and put two fingers to his lips and whistled piercingly. Believing his ruse had succeeded, Togy burst from concealment bellowing in triumph. He changed to a yell of fear as he saw the rifle barrel come through the window and turned to hurl himself into cover.

Porter had time to get his man, but instead of firing he suddenly slumped in a heap, the gun clattering down beside him. The girl kneeled and threw her arms around him as he would have fallen on his face, and eased him back until his head rested on her knee. Her eyes, stretched wide with horror, beheld the blood-flecked lips and the blue-black hole high in his chest.

"The window! Shoot!" he muttered.

Then she had ear for the wild cries, and lowering his head to the floor, she caught up the rifle and gained a window. Three men were breaking from the woods, but they were looking backward and not at the cabin. She held her fire and saw two horsemen burst from cover, firing on the men afoot. It was all ended almost as quickly as the fight in the shed. Then the horsemen were galloping to the cabin,

and the girl, with her arms through the bars, was urging them on, crying:

"Faster! faster! A brave man's dying in here!"

The door, secured on the outside, was hurled open. Hawkins Taylor was the first to enter. On his heels came Washington Jefferson. Taylor discovered the wounded man and with curt nod to the girl hurried to him. She pleaded:

"Don't harm him! He defended me! He can't be all bad!"

Taylor examined the wound hurriedly and told his companion:

"Ride back to that other house. Fetch some whisky. We can't move him."

As Jefferson ran to his horse Taylor told the girl:

"Porter was one of several men sent out here by the Government to put a stop to counterfeiting. To secure evidence he worked along the river in the Stokes' show. I met him in St. Louis and had a working agreement with him. His visit to your cabin was planned between us just as his partner, Stacy, was murdered near Montrose by a river thief."

With mouth agape she stared at him. When she could speak it was to say:

"A Gov'ment man. Why did he come to us?"

"After your pap, Miss Columby. Wash knows all about it. Your pap was careless about the kind of money he passed along the river."

"Will he die?" she whispered.

"God knows. I hope not. It's a bad hurt, but it's high. It'll depend on the nursing. We can't move him to the river and a doctor."

"I'll nurse him. You got pap yet?"

"No. I had no evidence—just suspicions. All depends on Porter. Puts you in a hard place. I reckon you 'n' Wash better go home and I'll stay."

"I shall take care of him, of course. I've had bad thoughts about him. But I'd nurse him, no matter what happens, after the fight he made for me."

Porter touched her hand and with bubbling breath told her:

"No evidence against your father—Never saw him— You go—with Wash."

"I'll help you lift him to the blankets, Sheriff. I'm very strong. Did you git Togy?"

"Big man. Black whiskers," murmured Porter.

"We got Togy. Take him by the heels, Miss Columby."

After moving him to the blankets, Taylor put cold compresses on the wound and frankly told the girl the invalid would have to make his own fight, largely. As he worked he explained:

"Wash and me found Togy's message left in the cabin. I'd made believe to chase Porter into Smith City, but we couldn't wait to go 'round that way and have Smith City warn the gang of our coming. We found the trace your pap came home by and the one Togy used in bringing you here."

Porter interrupted by motioning for Taylor to come closer. The deputy-sheriff bowed his head and Porter told him:

"My Government money—gold—buried ten paces from back of small cabin near bunkhouse—Wash."

"I understand. I'll get it. You want to speak to Wash?"

"Alone."

Jefferson came up on a mad gallop, carrying a jug of whisky in his hand. The wound was bathed with this and Porter drank a little diluted with water. Then Taylor took the girl to the other end of the room, after telling Jefferson that Porter wished to speak with him. Jefferson bowed his head and Porter explained:

"They say your pap took four horse-loads bogus silver from here. I never saw it or him. Possible witnesses are dead, outside. Bogus coins should be found—destroyed."

"I never can thank—"

"Don't." And the wounded man's face grimaced with pain that was not caused by his hurt. "Quitting the service when I get up. Not for you, or your father. For Miss Columbia. Go—now. Your father can find good land in the West."

Jefferson pressed Porter's hand and joined the two at the end of the room, and without looking at his sister said to Taylor:

"If you can spare me I must be riding out tonight. I'll send men back to bury those men. I'll return soon."

"Mr. Porter is badly wounded, Wash. You should stay here," insisted his sister.

"Yes. I'll stay if I can help him. It's his wish that I ride out tonight."

Taylor eyed him gravely and said:

"Porter gives me orders in this case. We can get along without you. If he says go, then ride."

THE carts were loaded with the Jeffersons' household goods and supplies. Hants had returned from the Missouri shore to announce that Pap Jefferson had taken up some likely land. Washington Jefferson, impatient to be off, climbed to his seat and gathered up the reins as the dogs bayed a welcome to those who were late in returning from Montrose. Hants rode into the clearing and loudly cried:

"Stretch out, Wash. T'others will overtake us. Lawd! but I'm keen to lay my eyes on that new land ag'in. Fine grass 'n' timber high above the river. No fresh can drown you out. An' sightly! Why, a one-eyed man can see to —— 'n' gone—Wash! What's hidin' behind that cart?"

Jefferson grinned broadly and explained—

"Just some comp'ny to see you."

Hants' jaw sagged and he stared with lack-luster eyes as a tall, muscular woman straightened to her full height and walked around the cart to face him. He quailed before her gaze, although her voice was mournfully humble. She was the first to speak, saying:

"Are it you at last, Missoury Hants? A body would 'a' thought you mighten 'a' come home. You been gone a mighty long stretch to git a coon you 'lowed was treed inside a heave 'n' a toss of our cabin. The childrun are smartly grow'd."

This appeared to be the cue for two strapping boys and a girl to emerge from behind the cart. The older boy shrilly greeted him:

"Howdy, Pap Hants. Where'd you git that smart rifle-gun? Mam says I'm to go with you on your next coon-huntin' so's you won't git lost."

"We're pullin' out along with you, Pap," informed the girl.

"Well, well," weakly muttered Hants. "All my little fambly once more all with me. Nancy, I'm powerful glad to see ye an' the younkers. Just 'bout to start down across the line an' herd the parcel of you up here. Good Lawd, but if I ain't been lonesome an' fair tuckered out with travelin' an' land-lookin' since I left you last fall!"

"A year ago last fall, Missoury Hants," corrected his wife. "Where you go we're goin'." Her deep-set eyes gleamed ominously as she added, "An' your wanderin', land-lookin' days is over. Git up into that cart an' squat in the middle. Arkansas Hants, squat on one side of your pap. Alabama Hants, you squat behind him. I'll take this side to keep him from fallin' out."

With Hants a prisoner in the bosom of his family, Jefferson cracked his whip and the little exodus began. The dogs bayed another welcome and Jefferson turned, grinning expectantly. Although he could glimpse the couple on horseback he soon realized the two did not intend to overtake him. Walking their horses, Mr. and Mrs. Enoch Porter rode closely side by side. And as he leaned toward her and half pulled her from the side-saddle he insisted—

"Now what's the terrible secret you were to tell me, Columbia?"

"The four bags that Wash buried where they'll never be found. I'll never forgit what you did for pap."

"For you, Columbia. And I had no evidence against pap."

Mascots

BY NORMAN SPRINGER

THE battleship in which I served most of my cruise had an easy-going executive officer who liked animals. Consequently the furred and feathered creatures who lived in that ship could at any time have stocked a good-sized menagerie. Indeed, the First Luff more than once declared we weren't a man-o'-war at all, but a blanked circus, and he was going to clear 'em out.

But he never did. At one and the same time I remember the following animals living in that ship:

1—The goat. Nearly every ship in the fleet had a goat which was considered the ship's official mascot. Our goat was a veritable king of his kind in size and odor and general deviltry. He looked just like old King Leopold, but we called him Archy, and his fond caretaker gilded his horns. Archy chewed tobacco, loved his beer and dined impartially on vegetables, textiles and minerals. He was given to stealthy and violent assaults upon people who were looking the other way, a bad habit encouraged by the common herd. It ruined his life, really, because one Sunday morning he rammed the swallow-tails of the paymaster's dress coat while that high dignitary was passing along the spar deck. Even the First Luff couldn't overlook this, and Archy was banished to the marine barracks in the Navy yard—sad fate for any sea-going goat.

2—Another goat. This was a gentle little nanny, brought aboard when a little kid in the fond hope she would grow up and marry Archy. She had no bad habits except her customary goatish appetites. She ate most everything, but for some reason preferred New York *Heralds* and human hair. This last was her especial tidbit, and fellows sleeping on deck were frequently aroused by little Nanny chewing their locks.

3—Three dogs, most important of which was Nellie, a bull bitch, the beloved property of the First Luff himself. Nellie was an animal without the least sense of discretion; she'd just as soon bite an admiral as a coal-passer. One of the bright memories of my enlistment is of a morning in Trinidad when "Gimpey" Evans paid a surprize visit to the ship. Nellie took him by the trousers' leg as he came over the gangway. No, nobody was shot, not even Nellie. But several very pink-eared officers and scores of delighted gobs listened to some very prime language while "Fighting Bob" relieved his feelings.

4—Nosey Bill, a raccoon. A sly, secretive little animal with a cold, investigating nose. His great stunt was to nose the Bull Durham sack out of a man's jumper pocket, open it with his forepaws and spill the contents.

5—A bear cub who rapidly developed carnivorous tendencies and had to be shipped off to a zoo.

6—At least six cats who lived in various parts of the ship and came together only for concert purposes.

7—Bill, a parrot, at once the most unfortunate and most profane bird I ever knew. Bill could swear in German, Spanish and English. He fell into the dough-mixer and came out almost denuded of feathers and swearing in all three languages at once. He met his end insulting the bear cub at too close quarters.

8—A kangaroo. This sad and agile beast was presented to us in Australia. He committed suicide at sea by hopping over the rail.

9—A yellow-crested cockatoo. He ate up hardwood railings, severed wire ropes with his awful beak and bit chunks out of friendly sailormen. His dispatch was speedy and official.

Continuing

ROGER POCOCK'S

Serial of Old Iceland

A New Found World

YOU KNOW—or do you?—that our spirits do not die, but return again and again to this world to live over in men's bodies. Here am I, therefore, in the body of Captain B—, wounded in the great war and now slowly recuperating; but the strange thing is that I do not forget my other lives, as generally happens, but recall them much more clearly than anything which ever happened to Captain B—. So for my own gratification and that of Nurse Maryon I am setting down what occurred when I was Leif, son of Eric the Red of Iceland.

A clever lad I was, for when but a little fellow I made the crew of my father's ship, the *Fafnir*, grapple and bring home a huge log, very valuable, for wood was scarce with us. But that log was our undoing, through the trickery of Katla the witch who had tried to marry my father, and hated us in consequence. She made us believe that Thorgest Skinflint would have us carve the wood into fittings for his son's bridal home—nay, would have it carved with Christian saints, unfit for any decent house.

On the way to deliver the work, next fall, I helped stone Katla to death for her witchwork against Arin the Peacemaker at Newlithe whereby Arin was exiled and his little wife Aud lost her hand. But even in dying, Katla called out against my father, saying his curse would yet fall on him.

And so it would seem, but through my fault. For having got the confession of Michael Craftsman, released by Katla's death from bondage to her, we were about to come to satisfactory understanding with old Thorgest, when I started a fisticuff duel with Bear Heliufson, captain of the warship *Flying Dragon*. The crew of the two ships took part, and

Thorgest's three sons were drowned. But Skinflint would take gold for honor, so my father lost his lands. Then with three ships and a hundred and fifty followers—men, women and bairns—he proposed fleeing westward to where once as a lad he caught a glimpse of a great unknown land.

When ships were dighted and their crews assembled we sailed to the trial of Eric at Thorsness. There Slaying Stir won my father's case against Snorri, who demanded his life in addition to the were-gelt. Then we sailed to Greenland and made our new home there. On an exploring trip which I led, Grelad, a thrall girl who bore a grudge against me because I had refused to notice her enticements, incited the crew against me. They marooned me in the land of the Eskimos. But I soon made fast friends of these strange folk, pursued my traitors, who had wrecked the ship and brought them home to justice. Now was the time near when I must begin my voyage in search of that new continent of which Patrick the bard made prophetic redes.

CHAPTER V

AMERICA DISCOVERED

IN THE beginning of our second wintering at Brattelid we built the dais and, making much of that event, mother had Eric down on all fours to ride him round, "Gee-up!"

Here is her stave to the tune of the cradle song:

> Oh, such a slug to ride!
> And such a wolf to feed!
> And if I kick off half its hide
> So much the worse its greed.
> Whoa!

That's when the horse bucked, in the very moment when there came a call at the door. Mother made haste to dust and preen herself and climb into the high seat, very stately, while there filed in twenty-two men—the famished, frozen, weary seamen-partners of Bear Heliulfson's *Flying Dragon*. They stood in a clump, abashed, uncovered to give shy greetings, asked leave to come in, so much on their manners that they must not stamp or shake the snow off their storm clothes.

"Tut-tut," said mother and bustled her maids. "Peel them," she said. "Under each oily coat there's a man worth kissing. Tyrkir, get beer. Leif, rouse the fire, and all the rest of you broil venison for them."

Still shy as wolves, these mariners tore the ice from their beards, shed storm-clothes, nudged one another at sight of the giggling maids and settled down in rows beside the long hearth, patiently hopeful of beer and venison. Only their Steersman Fatty Ulf stood in his furs before Eric, resolved on making a speech, trying to scratch out the words from a bald head.

Said Eric:

"Good greeting to you, Steersman. What tidings have you?"

"Oh, aye. Oh, aye. It's like this, Captain. Me and them comes to you, and what I got to say is, I dunno—ye see, sir, it's all along o' that Bear. No grievance, mind you. We ain't got no grievance. We ain't complaining, mark you. 'Tain't as if we'd been speared or drowned. It's not that we mind this Bear buying of thralls in England to sell in Norway ports so long as the trade pays him and partners. We all be partners. We reckon no harm in him calling hisself a viking chief so long as he holds sound views on beer and victuals. We'm not unreasonable at him being crossed in love; we all knows there's hussies about. As to him staying drunk by the month on hid stores in the ship—which accidents might happen to us all. Then there's pink rats and snakes which is within his rights, and never troubles us.

"Mind you, if Bear has his little weaknesses, his views is still sound on beer. Wit you well, Eric Thorwaldson, we'm not unreasonable. We'm seafaring men—not pets. This here Bear don't know the way, and none of us has fared in the Greenland seas. We did put much thought into that until we'm settled in our minds that Eric the Red hisself don't

know the way to Greenland until he went to find out if there's any such place, the same being very unlikely. And if his coastwise lubbers can come there we deep sea men ain't used to getting lost. Mind you, we be raised rough and talks ugly, but we means what we says when we pays sea compliments."

Here were murmurs of praise from all sea-partners, standing up now to back Fatty in lauding Eric, while he scratched for ideas in his head. Eric said—

"You got as far as the beer."

"Yes, that's the trouble," said Fatty, "we ran short, and taking departure from Eyrar sails a knuckle to the south-'ard of Ut-Sudur-Saeth."

"Great Thor!" cried Eric. "So poor Bear went mad!"

"Aye, aye, sir, as Bear says 'all men will count us foolhardy.' But that was just our luck, all sailor men being fools, or we'd stay ashore.

"So three days out the waters did hide the land, and the fair wind sent back to where she comes from. A northerly air brung that fog. Afterward full many days we dunno where we was, though we seen land birds. Then the sun give us our bearings again, so we made sail westward. And we seen land.

"We did talk plenty then, and made not much headway withal, but as we drew nigh we seen level forest with little humps thereon. Full great were the tides, moreover, which we seen as we skirted the foreshore."

"So by Thor's mighty aid," cried Eric, "you let your cargo overboard and gat us a lading of timber?"

"Nay, I didn't." Ulf hung his head with shame. "Unless we'd have Bear overboard. No, we bore away to the norrard, sailing into another landfall, and axes him if we be comin' to Greenland.

" 'See you great fells?' he axed, 'and ranges ice-clad?' but the land was low, and we left it."

"What like?"

"Fair level forest, Leif. How you be growed, to be sure. And all of us minded to winter there, getting timber for Greenland trade i' the spring. But this-yere Bear— Mind I makes no complaint— The wind did fail us and sorely did we lack fuel for our men, not to mention fresh water in the casks. But Bear recked naught o' that. For by the hidden stores of liquor he had to live on he ate little of cooked food and scorned fresh water. As if we wanted to wash! He set us all at oars out to the high sea, into sou'westerly weather and strong blows.

"Two days it was ere we made land again. High land was this and mountainous, with icefields. Bear saw naught there to lure him, and when we would fain enter he put about. Nor would he lower sail, but bore away. As we looked aft we seen that land was an island.

"Now came the gale full strong, straining both mast and hull till we reefed down, aye and were well nigh pooped by following seas. Two days we runs wet before the dirty weather, and we sees the feet of these-yere fells reaching down out of the clouds. Again we axes Bear if this be Greenland, we running the while betwixt low skerries and great surf, making for shelter. Bear won't prophesy no more until he's sure, so we comes to an haven where is a store shed and a boat spilled over. 'Behold,' says Bear, 'how by my pilotage I brung you ignorant seamen, e'en to my father's house. Set me a-land!' So we locks 'un into the cabin.

"At that a thrall of yourn come yawning out of the shed where we slept, and we axes him, 'Is this yere Greenland?'

" 'Oh, aye,' says he, 'and who be you an' all?'

"We says we be seafaring men, and is this Heliulf's stead?

"So he waves his hand to west'ard by north and says it's three hundred mile, but Ericstead is near-by, up this yere fiord. Whereat we shoves off to the mouth of this fiord and up the same till we be comin' to where it's froze. Where she did freeze, in did we lay up the ship and set the ten thralls to making winter quarters. They've struck the mast,

pitched the tent over her, and if they burn a sliver from her timber they'll have their heads chopped off. So we be comin' here."

"But what have you done with your master?"

"Oh, him? Why to be sure. Bear's in his cabin, what you'm calls hibernating, which sucks its paws between sleeps. Come spring he has the ship, ten thralls for a crew, and his cargo to go to —— or Heliulf, for all we'm caring. We be comin' here.

"It's not as if we grumbled or made complaint or set forth grievance, master. We loses our oar-shares in ship, cargo and thralls. We don't mind so long as we loses Bear, and we be comin' here."

"Why come you?"

"We comes to offer man-service."

"Well comin'," said Eric, and they all fell to cheering until they were hoarse as crows.

There is to my mind a rough and simple greatness in Ulf's tale, well worthy of its theme. From such folk as our Northmen, such mariners as our Icelanders, this new world could not be hidden. The first ship to be driven westward must find Greenland, the which discovery befell to Gunnbiorn, son of Ulf the Crow. The first ship drifting to the west and south could not fail to discover North America, the which befell to Biorn, son of Heliulf with the *Flying Dragon*. Here was no marvel, nothing to doubt, and still less anything to make a song about.

Eric had seen, by the bird flights of spring and autumn, that some such World-riding as Europe lay to the south-'ard of us. Eric and I knew well that our dire need of timber would drive us to go in search of that great new land so soon as we could spare a ship for the adventure. Now Fatty Ulf brought tidings that the unknown land was found, and the gods had sent us a ship which could be used for getting timber thence.

Well pleased were we to have the tidings, the ship and these twenty-two honest, hale mariners added to our strength. We knew these men, and they knew us—had we not fought them at Broadlair? To fight men is the quick sure way of learning their hearts, their minds, their powers, of winning their respect, of knowing their value. Think you that Ulf would have brought his men from Bear's to Eric's service but for the Broadlair fight? Now was our man-strength doubled.

Concerning this-yere Bear, as Ulf would say, let him be master mariner, trader, slaver or viking so long as men trusted their lives to him at sea. And yet a leader is a man with followers. Who was then fool enough to follow Bear?

I would fare quick to his rescue, but mother said, "No you don't." She said this would be a wild, fierce, proud Bear so long as its food lasted, with a ship, a crew of ten, a cargo, a voyage to Heliulfsness, and rude, nasty manners. Mother would have no quarrels or slayings in Greenland.

Ulf gave me comfort then, saying that the people would use the afterboat and dinghy for fuel before they injured the ship. As to provisions, a fortnight at the most would see them famished.

So we did send out the seamen to be wintered in twos and threes among our neighbors. They should make reindeer clothes, share the hunting and fishing and learn Greenland ways. Next summer they should go home to bring their families from Iceland. When they were ready to settle we would give a farm in exchange for each of their oar-shares. With this were they well content.

Even as Ulf promised, within three weeks came Bear's ten thralls, all run away from him and pleading to us for succor. Their leader was Harald Christian, a lad from the Isle of Man. 'Twas he who made the famous Sea-rollers Lay. Black were his eyes and hair, his face of the greatest beauty of all men in Greenland, with a twinkle of fun, a smile on his lips. I have met few bolder men, none better than this poor slave. Right gallantly he spoke for the other thralls, so Eric gave them welcome. We set them to work making good rein-skin clothes to keep them warm, and presently had them all away to the farms to learn our Greenland ways. I kept Harald to be my man.

THE THRALLS were gone when Bear came, a gaunt, starving man, bleak, ferocious, running into the house and at me with drawn sword. I tripped him full-length on the floor, then took his sword, bidding him mind his manners. Then he began to scold, like a wet hen, querulous, demanding blood-gelt for the men I had slain long years agone at Broadlair. He smoldered over his cargo, brought past a good Iceland mart to waste on ragged Greenlanders. He made demand for two and twenty useless, vagrom, would-be mariners, whose flesh he would have for the eagles. He charged me with stealing ten thralls, mere vermin but his own. He said all men were vile, that he would have his rights by law of Iceland and his revenge with the might of Norway upon us.

I gave a clout under the ear to quiet him, for it was noisome to have this bully raving before the Lady Hilda, at her hearth. So he sat up rubbing his eyes till his sight cleared. Seeing him weak, and being ready to offer food to a starving guest, I let him have the sword back; but now he snapped the blade across his knee while he swore horribly, obscenely, blaspheming his gods and the Christ.

"Diddums then," said mother, "Diddums lose its temper then, and sit on the floor saying its prayers, the nicey little pet? Now it shall sit there and see us have our dinner."

So Diddums with a shriek of passion jumped up, to yell curses at us from the doorway, from the garth, from the wide snows beyond. Yet it was not of much avail to him that he sought shelter at any other house, since, trusting Bear so far as we could see him, Eric had sent forth word that he must not be housed or fed except at Brattelid.

After a day he came back, quite tame, explaining, with some pride, that he was subject to the berserker rage. Albeit this was not usual that a berserker should run away. Thrall-born and underbred as the man was, I now began rather to like this Bear; and when my father would send him to the sty to learn manners I did take his part. When all was said Bear had seacraft to win through notable voyages, brains which had made him a very wealthy trader, valor not to be beaten abject in his downfall.

Lest he made mischief in our colonies, it was my mother's wisdom that bade me turn his enmity to friendship. Thus, when he found none else to speak with him, or feed him, or any refuge else from the pitiless winter, he clung to me as the sole anchor holding him to life.

Setting about his training I showed no hurry. After he was rude, trying to knife me in bed, he fed at the porch, and slept in the garth for a week. Snapping at me would cost him a day's food, but when he cheered up a little he was sent to live with the horses. His offer to help with the work won him a place at the hearth, and a little stave of song got him a bedplace. By that time he was making haste to be good, but when he would talk business I sheered off.

Not for a month or so would I hear of buying his thralls, the cargo or the ship, until he became so urgent that I yielded, sending Harald Christian to see he had not burned the *Flying Dragon* out of spite. He sulked at that, and lost a fortnight ere I made signal fires to gather our folk at the house. They came, and at our feast Bear was quite charming as he sat in the lower high-seat opposite to my father. Well for me his laughter could not poison my food, or his smile stab through my heart. He had great pride, never to be appeased until he murdered me.

AFTER the dinner I did call a man-mote so all the eastern colony might witness the treaty which Bear urged, which I accepted, so any complaint made afterward would brand him liar.

First for the Broadlair slayings Bear claimed were-gold. Many bare witness that Eric had paid this money into court, which Bear could have on demand from the priest at Thorsness.

Bear took witness that through no fault of ours at Brattelid his seamen and thralls

forsook the ice-bound ship. Master, seamen and thralls alike had come to us as mariners in distress, and all took oath on Eric's arm-ring that none had been denied the fullest succor.

Now I confronted Bear as standing for the ship-shares, with Steersman Ulf as standing for the oar-shares in the *Flying Dragon*. I bade them appraise the ship, the thralls and the cargo, setting a just price upon their adventure. It was like tying two cats by their tails and hanging them over a clothes-line. Fatty Ulf knew that I was giving a farm for each of the oar-shares, so that the men's half of the venture was secure. Nought cared he or they what money went to Bear. The less I paid Bear the better pleased would they be. Ulf beat prices down until Bear screamed with rage, but nobody could blame me. Indeed I had Bear pleading for my aid when I asked good old Einar to be umpire.

Einar ruled fair prices, at market values, which made Bear green with fury at being outwitted in his attempt to cheat me. For my part I left the house and fed the horses, nor would I come back until Einar, Bear and Ulf were ready to take oath on a fair agreement. So Einar named the price, and I consented to buy.

"Now," said I, "let all men witness that I do pay half this amount for the ship-shares, half for the oar-shares. I pay for the oar-shares in land, a farm for each. I pay for the ship-shares in cash. Einar, I call you as umpire to give this rede. What is the custom in paying so great a sum?"

"So great a sum," said Einar, "no man in Greenland could pay in less than five yearly payments."

"Bear," said I, "do you agree?"

Now he stood thinking, and well could I see the thought: "For lack of men I can not take away ship, cargo or thralls; these are a dead loss unless I find I a buyer. There is no other buyer. And if I have Lief murdered I lose the payments." For five years he must be good or lose his money.

"Take witness," said I, "that payments end if I die. And on this bargain, Bear, I give you passage to your father's house."

Then Bear saw the bear-trap, but he closed the bargain.

We Northmen were great gossips, and very soon the tale spread over the northern world, this saga of Bear the Blind, who, finding a new World-riding, with boundless wealth in timber, could not be bothered to scull a dinghy ashore.

Right well resolved was I that the wealth of a new found world would not be good for Bear. I so disposed of him that if he went for timber he must swim. He was the laughing-stock of the northern nations, and yet I can not rob him of his credit. Fool as he might be, this Biorn son of Heliulf did, in the year of Christ's reign 986, find those lands which today are known as Labrador and Newfoundland. 'Twas he, and not Columbus or any other, who discovered the mainland of the Americas, and that is one of the greatest events in human annals.

"A new world," said mother. "Hoots! Will it add one flitch of bacon to any Northman's larder?"

Nine centuries bear witness to the grim truth of that rede, for one may search far in the Americas to find the Northmen's portion.

CHAPTER VI

BERSERKERS AND A VEILED LADY

"LOOK you," said Eric over the chess-board, "your young Rook must needs leave his hearth unguarded to go a-viking and storm my king in his burg. But while he fares adventurous, my little thrall here creepeth into your garth, with *skak* to your queen. And so I rede you, have a strong burg for your bass before you seek adventures over the seas."

"There was a dog," crooned mother, "who had a bone, and saw its shadow reflected in the stream. He dropped his bone and snatched. Will you drop Greenland to snatch at shadows, Leif?"

My heart was hot for the new-world venture, frantic lest any other man should reap its glory. Yet must I set the very

first example in obeying Eric, who bade me wait, saying the new lands would not run away. He was resolved that our Greenland colonies should be deeply rooted, not washed away by the first storms of disaster, but a secure base of two hundred farms on which we could fall back if new adventurings failed.

He ruled that henceforth Thorwald should be pilot with the *Fafnir*, and my young brother Stein land agent for the western settlement. He ruled that I should be pilot with the *Flying Dragon* and himself land agent for the eastern settlement. So it was my first duty to take the *Dragon's* seamen-partners to Iceland and fetch their families.

Once my mind was set on Iceland I felt a good deal younger. No man of nineteen winters had done better than I in fighting, seamanship and exploring, or gained in lawful ways such wealth as I had. So being the owner and master of a warship, I needs must fare to Iceland as a chief. The copper scales on the *Dragon's* head and tail were burnished bright as sunrays. We made a painted sail, and raised my standard. The ten thralls, well armed and in reinskin dress, should be my own attendants.

I let make my white bearskin into a winter coat, so hot and heavy that I marveled how the beast from whom I took this plunder had ever endured the wearing. Mother broidered and jeweled my reindeer suit. Of the green plumage from the necks of wild-fowl I had a robe of state, and Eric gave me a circlet for my head of rough red gold. I forged new armor and weapons, very plain and good. Last, at our setting forth in spring, mother threw me a cushion of poultry feathers.

"An' you wed," she told me, "your wife will be hard put to steer your pride; she may as well sit soft."

Right early in the season I landed Fatty Ulf and his seventeen married seamen at Eyrar in Southwest Iceland to sell their homes, buy boats and meet me two months hence. The single men and thralls came with the ship. Running before the wind we crossed Mane Bay, rounded Snowfell and bore up along the dear familiar shore of Broadfirth to anchor

at last in Bear Haven. Of my trading with Worm the Slender in Greenland, wares for livestock, there is no need to dwell, for I am eager to reach the telling of the berserker story.

Now you shall know that a berserker is one who in his warth is changed, possessed, fearless of fire and steel as a mad dog. In Swede-realm there dwelt two brothers, Halli and Leikner, poor freemen, soldiers to Eric the Victorious, right famous giants, warriors and berserkers, known throughout the northlands. King Eric drafted them to serve with the Earl Hakon who ruled Norway. They were not well content.

Now, casting back to the tale of the Mewlithe slayings and flight of my friend Arin the Peacemaker from Iceland, you will remember that with him went Worm the Slender. Poor little Worm was afraid of his big brother Slaying Stir and sought for peace in Norway, but presently grew homesick and minded to return. He would go home to Iceland, yet dared not. If he could get the two berserkers into his service to be his guards he would feel brave as a mouse full of beer, defiant toward that big, overbearing brother. The berserkers were beguiled by promises of marriage with Icelandic women. Earl Hakon was ready to let them go with Worm, but warned him that these men were perilous to deal with.

"That may be," said Worm, who had a lisp, "but you don't know Thtir my brother. He'th much worthe than any dozen bertherkers."

It was in the summer of my father's banishment Worm brought them to Bearhaven.

At first the berserkers were quite tame, looking about them for maids to have in marriage. These men were of gentle birth, not to be pleased with any common women. They had no luck and presently reminded Worm as to his promises. Poor Worm! He knew that no Icelandic lady would ever mate with a berserker. He said so. Then Leikner mourned his luck, but Halli was in a snarling, wolfish temper, and soon the pair of them waxed right big and rough, driving Worm from the house. He fled to Stir, offering his berserkers as a gift of brotherly and most loving kindness.

I wish I had seen Stir's grin as he watched the sour and offish little brother so suddenly full of love.

"I am too tut-tut-timid," said he, "to hire such followers. They need a bub-brave master like you, to bub-bub-beat them when they're b-b-bumptious."

"Take them off my handth," said Worm, "and I'll give you a boar and three thows, and a litter of nithe pigth."

"I don't want b-boars or sows or pup-pup-pigs or berserkers."

In the end the berserkers made up their minds that Worm was too like a lady, and they would serve with Stir, who was right manful. Stir took them both in his service, and had them with him when he slew Thorbiorn Jaw, a man who talked too much and got on people's nerves. The berserkers were indeed quite gentle, liking Stir full well and all his household, so much indeed that Halli fell head over ears in love with Stir's fair daughter Asdis. He would have her at once in marriage, or kill Stir.

This was very awkward; for ill would it beseem the Lady Asdis to wed a berserker. Moreover, she was betrothed from childhood to Snorri the Priest, a chief not to be lightly affronted. Stir took counsel with Snorri, and one long day they perched on Holy Fell, devising. From that did Stir come down in a bubble of laughter and rode home gaily to have speech with Halli.

"Men say, good Halli," quoth he, "that you seem somewhat bare of money, to keep my Asdis as she is wont to live. Yet you will mislike me unless you have her. Now will I, after the manner of the men of old, let you do some great du-de-deed for this b-bridal."

"I am a man of deeds," saith Halli.

So Stir showed to him the mighty lava stream and heaped up, stormy rock-surf which lay between his homestead and Bearhaven.

"Make me a road through this f-fuf-flood, bu-bu-build me a fort to guard me

against that w-wicked Worm, rear me a boundary wall betwixt his land and mine, and you shall have my d-d-daughter."

"I am not wont to work," saith Halli very haughty.

And yet the brothers set to, and hard they wrought for a year making the road and the fort. You may see poor little Worm, whose lands were laid right open to attack, survey this labor as an oyster the rending of his shell. You may see fair Asdis visiting the work to see the nearness of her fateful marriage, wearing her best clothes and passing nervous. You may see Slaying Stir the while building his new bath-house, with a great pit for the furnace and a little window for stoking up the flames. Above the furnace was the bathing floor, fed with a trickle of water to make steam, and over all a dome with a trapdoor for the bathers to climb in. It was a fine bath-house and marvelous hot withal.

NOW WAS the road finished and the fort complete, but the boundary wall to be made, the work still going briskly. Asdis in her best clothes looked on while the berserkers sang staves in her honor. The labor of these giants may still be seen after nine hundred years, a mighty work much visited by travellers.

It is in the nature of berserkers to fight or work with fury, and yet to be foredone and void of might after their passion. So, on the last evening of their labor, Stir thanked his giants who were spent and bade them come to the bath to be refreshed.

"Asdis will like you better washed," said he.

They went in.

So soon as he had them inside the dome, Stir piled great rocks on the trap-door. Lest they break through he laid in front of the trap a raw and slimy cowskin which would give no foothold. Then was the furnace fed, the flames blew high, and the bath waxed so hot that presently the two giants were leaping at the trapdoor. Halli broke out, only to fall on the cowskin where Stir did quiet him with a sword-stroke. Leiker got half out but was pushed back.

It was perhaps five years later when I came up the berserker's road from Bearhaven to guest with Stir at Lava. He showed me the bath-house and the graves.

"Now is Asdis wedded," said he, "to my nephew Snorri. She owns that I was right, and must have met my end unless I b-bub-boiled these berserkers or b-bub-boiled young Snorri instead. And is a woman ever quite content? I think she rather wishes I'd b-boiled Snorri and let her have her berserker. I liked that Halli well, much better than my nephew, but it can't be helped." He sighed. "Would you like a bub-bu-bath?"

I think Stir was not altogether liked—he was too whimsical.

Since his wife died, and all the neighbors wished him in Valhalla, Stir had been lonely and so kept open house. What with his two-score men-at-arms and their families, old folk, tramps and runaway thralls in refuge, besides the passing chapmen and peddlers and hordes of dogs and cats, the place was always thronged.

When he had indigestion he would thin out the crowd with a sword. The farm was left to run itself, and the house likewise, yet unless the children at play mislaid the cooking pots, or nobody remembered to kill meat, or fuel ran short because the folk were lazy, there seemed to be plenty to eat, and more to waste. The master was blithe, keen at the hawking, setting the people on at horse-fights, ball game, turf play and dancing, so that they never lacked an appetite. When supplies ran short Stir had to rob his neighbors to make both ends meet, and told me sadly he was misunderstood.

Alone in the women's bower dwelt the veiled lady who had lately come with Alfgeir's ship into Bearhaven and would not have speech with Stir or any of us, so that nobody knew whence she came or what was her business or when she would go away.

"'Tis thus with any cat," said Slaying Stir. "A stray cat cometh, and nobody knows when or why or anything about

her. Nor will she answer questions. She just comes and stays, and there's an end of it. Drive her out? Nay, she comes back and has ku-ku-kittens. So with this w-w-w-woman—unless I keep a bright look out she'll mu-mu-marry me. That's what they w-w-ant as a rule. I am in luck there's only one of her and not a dozen."

She came at night up the new road from Bear-haven, and sheltered in the bower from whence ere morning all the women bolted. Indeed, a woman who never speaks at all is feared by all her fellows as uncanny, a witch, or mad or having the evil eye. Stir complained to me, full of his grievance:

"I told her to go, but she w-w-won't. How should a mere man guess what a w-woman will do or won't, when she doesn't know herself? Oh, an' you doubt me, Leif, go marry one of 'em. I did."

So the lady dwelt in the bower and nobody had seen her lift the veil or even heard her voice. She would fetch food from the house, for none denied her, but always ate alone and ever lived in silence. When she walked across the garth the children fled, while the grown-ups made the witch sign, pointing at her.

"I wish," said Stir, "you'd ask her w-what she wo-wo-wants."

The lady was tall and slight with a rare grace of bearing, a sweet, sad majesty. The gray robes seemed to float like mist through rain. The sight of her conjured up visions of divine beauty, all I had dreamed of perfect womanhood. You who have seen clouds making a great mystery of the hills, will know how my lady's veil declared her lovely. I hid and watched her, followed reverently at a distance, taking cover lest she should see me and be affronted. I humbled myself very low to do her worship, with all the purity of a first great love. 'Twas plain she loved all things beautiful, for she would be abroad to watch the sunrise, the sunset, the moonlit nights, or pass like a sweet gray spirit through the evening mist.

She gathered flowers and took them to her bower, she played with the calves and foals, the ponies followed her across the mead to be fed and petted. The cats and dogs went visiting to her bower. Only from human company she fled, or passed disdainfully. I noticed with the passing days that she seemed to walk less, more often to sit and rest, as if she were losing strength.

It seemed distasteful that this gentlewoman should go to seek her meat, in Stir's dirty house and hear unseemly words from the women. I used to kill birds, or get tongues, kidneys, eggs or any dainty fare for my thralls to cook, and leave at the bower door. She came no more to the house and once or twice stood at her door to thank me. Her voice was low, with the croon of a sunlit burn and the singing lilt of the Swedes. It thrilled me like soft music.

IN THE red upbreak of an angry day I found my lady kneeling beside the berserker's grave, and she prayed after the manner of the Christians. Her gray robes were part of the night, one with the shadows, until she stood, and over the tundras came her desolate voice wailing—

"Halli, Leikner!"

After a while she drew a long dagger from her girdle, held it above her, where it caught the red light from the east, then kissed the cross of the hilt.

Now was it plain that my lady was sister to the murdered berserkers, come to avenge them. This I revealed to Stir, who laughed.

"The game plays slow," he said. "Tell her to hurry up."

"You will let her stay?"

"Why not? I would not have this lady out of my sight, lest I should feel the dagger before I saw her. Why don't you marry her?"

It was on the day when Stir lay bilious in his bunk and cursed Thor. The place was hushed, the fire out, the people gone to the hills, for fear that the master should be in one of his killing moods. I sent my thralls to buy a steer from Worm lest we go hungry, then set out myself

with a hawk, looking for grouse. I found my lady in the mead, eating angelica stalks, but at the sound of my coming she lowered her veil. I told her that I had sent my men for food.

"I'd rather eat your meat than Stir's," she answered.

"I am his friend," said I.

"So? He hath friends?"

"You ate his bread and salt."

My lady's laugh rang hard.

"And paid," said she. "There's an urn in the bower, wherein I put my money for Stir's food, else it would choke me. You may tell him that."

So now I knew that my lady thought not of Stir as her host, but kept her way clear for vengeance. I taxed her with the intent to murder him.

"Nay," she said, "but to avenge my brothers. My father is too old to come here, and there is no one else to claim their atonement, to give their uneasy spirits quietude. My brothers walk at night, they walk with me, Halli upon my right hand, Leikner on my left. Ever they try to lead me to where Stir sleeps that they may be requited and find rest. But my strength fails me, and then I am afraid, for I am Christian.

"My God says, 'Thou shalt not kill.' Christ bids me love my enemies and yet the ghosts of my dear brothers plead with me for rest, for sleep, there in their graves. Between their need and my dear faith in the Christ I am torn asunder. I don't know what to do."

She cried a little.

All this I told to Stir, bidding him pay blood-gelt to my lady, after our custom.

"Why yes," he answered, "if she'll go away. She's getting on my nerves and I grow peevish."

My lady scorned the offer of a were-gelt; whereat Stir held her to be a most unreasonable woman.

"And yet," said he, "to show there's no ill-feeling, I am quite ready to toss up a coin with her—heads that she kills me, tails that she k-k-kills herself, and sudden death at that, because she bu-bu-bores me."

Very cross indeed was my dear love, in that her holy mission was made fun of. Now both sides assailed me for being a go-between who fanned a smoldering quarrel to white flame. As for my part I was not less friend to Stir for being by this time well-nigh mad with love. Boldly I asked this gentlewoman if she would be my wife.

"An' you slay Stir," she answered.

If matters went ill before, they were much worse now. In vain I pleaded that my friend, so far from being the murderer she thought, had killed my lady's brothers in self-defense and only just in time to save his life.

"Their ghosts do walk," she said, "and must be laid. If you lack courage to lay them, speak no more with me."

As if I had made these ghosts!

The business was none of mine and yet, being crazed with love, I went with drawn sword to Stir, bidding him in all love and fellowship meet me at holmgang, since there was not room for both of us in the world.

"Lovers are ever selfish," he said, brushing away the sword I had at his throat. "Now is this meat for you and bones for me. If I kill you, youngster, I lose a fuf-friend, or if you slay me I lose both friend and life. Some day, my boy, when I am peevish, p-p-perhaps."

"Oh, not at all!" said I, ill-pleased at the thought of being set on unawares by Slaying Stir.

With all his mania for killing he seemed to me most reasonable, since many a man would have taken offense at less than I had offered.

Back went I to my lady, who sat in her bower weeping, and into her lap I threw the best thing I had, my necklace, with its tokens of all I had won in my life. All that I was desired her in marriage, all that I was revolted at her terms. At least the gods had made me gentleman, restrained from lying to Stir, from showing fear of him, from breaking faith with him, from murdering him, my oldest, dearest friend, my host.

Not so long ago had he saved my

father and our household, when all men else we trusted had failed us in our need. I might as well have thrown my necklace in the sea, since not for a moment did it stay her sharp demand that I must lose her love or slay my friend. Surely love drives hard bargains.

Stir laughed at me and yet was very kind, debating with me that evening as to whether I ought to murder him or no.

"Love lasts," he told me, "as long as a summer, yet honor, like a sword well kept, endures a life-time. This woman does not know what she is asking. And so she'd strip you of your honor, eh? Why man, go knock her down and master her at once. Show her what wedlock is where there's no honor. What is a woman who seeks to mate with a man outside of honor? Come, face the facts, boy! What more is such a woman than any common drab? Treat her as such, but do not make her mother of your children."

All this I told my lady, frankly and fairly, on my knees before her, she in a white rage when she understood.

"Honor!" she cried. "What is your honor to me? Your vanity is armored with conceit, you that I hire as butcher to do my killing."

"And yet you promised wedlock."

She flung my necklace in my face.

"I promised," she said in a cold rage, "to pay my butcher. I am the price to be paid for the slaying of this murderer, the price to be paid for laying the troubled ghosts of my dead brothers. Slay Stir and take me, but I will hear no talk of love or honor from such a thing as a hired murderer!"

So in her fury she stripped away all glamor of my love, until the fact stood naked—that lust should mate with murder. And if I were resolved to face the fact, and facing that go on—lured by her veiled beauty which must make amends for trampled love, fouled honor, life debased, self-scorn, rage, misery of a lost soul—at least before I dealt I would see my bargain. With a sudden snatch I wrenched away the veil and for just one moment saw her as she was—far gone in leprosy!

She clapped her hands to her face; moaning she turned away, this woman who had tried to cheat me into crime. She cast loose the two plaits of her hair to veil her face from me.

"And I did love you," she said.

She drew the long, cross-hilted dagger from her girdle and with both hands, moaning a little at the pain, drove the blade through her heart. So her dead body crashed to the ground at my feet.

Then, with my manhood given back to me, I picked up the necklace of my deeds and put it on again.

CHAPTER VII

THE SAGA OF HARALD CHRISTIAN

WHILE I was breaking my heart for the veiled lady came Harald Christian, leader of my thralls, to remind me in a little matter of shopping. I was to buy a maid to wait on my sister Asdis, and Harald brought such a servant, a thrall of Stir's—young, deft, healthy, and very beautiful. I bought her, and there was an end of the matter.

On the eve of our homeward passage to Greenland, Harald and this new slave came to me hand in hand, blushing, giggling, to say that they were wedded and to beseech my blessing. Now, like a child over broken toys, I mourned my fallen gods and shattered love, ready to ease the torment by smashing anything within reach, anything dear to me. We Icelanders in pagan times were wilful as overgrown children, peevish, ferocious, callous, passionate.

At that time I fully intended when we got to sea, that I would sink the ship, drowning with all her people. Now Harald in his impudence, stealing this woman who belonged to me, diverted my brooding into a silly rage. I had him ironed and the woman gagged, and so they remained until we made Erics-fiord.

We housed the ship, but ere I saw the people away to their homes I had the gagged woman chained to a bollard, just outside the *naust*. The man I lashed to a

post down in the tideway while the tide was low, and when we three were alone, I sat in the dinghy to watch the rising water. Bitter and angry still, of all creatures on earth I was most desolate.

Now Harald was a clean-blooded Northman, albeit slave and Christian, one who, despite his low estate, I had liked more than all other men, until this woman happened to come between us. I had no heart left, not even any desire for the woman, but the law was clear. If a man-thrall might in stealth or malice rob his owner of any woman thrall, all law was at an end. She was my property which I had bought and paid for, therefore a single woman until I gave or sold her. Harald should yield the woman, or I would make her single by his death.

Men called me the strongest, ablest and fairest of any in Greenland or Iceland, for it is always easy to commend the rich; but well I knew that Harald Christian in strength, in brains, in comeliness and right manhood greatly excelled me. Lashed as he was in the tideway, with the ripples lapping up about his knees, naked, bruised, famished, perishing of cold while he awaited death, he bore himself with all the easy majesty of some great king. I could not face his eyes.

"The tide seems long in rising," said I at last.

"Time hangeth heavy," he answered, "over all murderers. The tide seems swift to me."

Bleak was the wind and, as I watched, the little bitter waves lapped at his thighs, while the sleet drove between us. The woman chained and gagged, stood bleak and rigid and terrible in disdain, while her eyes burned me.

"Yield her," said I.

Harald's answer was a short, sharp laugh like a bark. Then he grinned at me.

"How does it feel," he asks, "with a soul in the flames of hell?"

And he was right.

As the ropes wetted, swelled, and shortened about him, the man was in frightful pain. His white skin was shadowed blue with cold. The numb jaws could not hold his teeth from chattering. My pride began to break as I told him to say the Thor prayer.

He chuckled, then broke out laughing.

" 'Twould be just like saying the multiplication table to a dead cat!"

"One prayer to Thor," said I, "will save your life."

"One prayer to Christ," he answered, "will save your soul."

"Bow your head to Thor and he will give you this woman, her freedom, your own and a good farmstead."

He held himself mighty high, with the tide round his thighs, while death from exhaustion seemed very near him.

"My wife would be shamed," he gasped, "to see me bow my head to any evil spirit while great Christ guards me. I have but one wish."

"What's that?"

"That you go away, leaving me with my wife until the end comes. Go, with my blessing."

Ashamed to obey him, afraid to stay lest he curse me, haunted most horribly by the woman's eyes, I crouched, hiding my head in both arms.

The tide lapped the man's hips before he spoke again. Then he did pray at me.

"Pity of Christ! This coward was once a man. Mother of God, he's the son of a good woman. A leper woman reft away his manhood; the Demons of Asgard deserted him in his grief. Christ, he hath nought of Thy valor to carry him alive through desolation, or Thy pure love to lift his soul from the dirt. Behold as my body dies his soul must perish.

"Thou, who has saved me out of slavery and given me this triumph of the Cross, grant me Leif's soul before I yield my body."

I asked him why he said that.

"Because," he said, "else will you ravish my wife."

Now did he seem to be beyond all pain, showing no signs of suffering, though the tide lapped in his armpits. He in his dying was happier than I had been in living, and never I knew such misery as then.

Great must be the power which lifted

him in death and weighed me down with life.

"Harald Christian, I grant you full pardon."

He laughed. Never was laughter so sweet, so brave as that.

"Who would have thought," he chuckled, "that I should have a joke to carry with me yonder."

I whipped out my sword to cut away the lashings, but he stayed me, commanded, overawed me.

"Since you have given me to my Lord, leave that to Christ," he said. "Keep silent while I pray for your passing soul, else you go quick to hell."

By his lips I could see that he prayed, I knew that he had altogether forgotten self and death was nothing to him. In a sudden panic I cried—

"What is this awful power—which you call Christ?"

The water was at his chin, but he stood with his head thrown back against the stake and his face took on a most unearthly beauty. Very low was his voice, but as he spoke he seemed to be gaining strength until the words rang out like a trumpet call.

"Christ is the love in your heart, that love incarnate in all living creatures which faith makes glorious and hope divine. That love heals every sorrow, eases pain, stays anger, turns tears to laughter, cowardice to valor, weakness into strength. It is immortal in self-sacrifice.

"Christ is love manifest on earth, the light of Heaven bridging the gulf of death, the very radiance of the all-Father, God made visible.

"Now by the Almighty Love which is Christ Jesus, I lift your spirit out of the deeps of death into the light of life. Lift up your heart unto the Christ and live!"

Then Harald, seeing that I made the sign of the cross, turned his head and shouted to his woman:

"Una, this man is Christ's and you are safe. Farewell, dear wife."

With that his eyes glazed and his head fell forward, so that the tide closed over him.

Drawn sword in hand, I sprang into the water, found and slashed through the ropes; then, taking my master by the arm, threw his limp body on my back and staggered with that burden up the bank, clear of the tideway. Straight to the ship I carried him and laid him beside the warm hearth and threw blankets over him. I cut the woman loose and made her help me at chafing the limbs, working the arms to get the breath of life into the lungs. Una made broth and both of us worked in feverish haste.

Night fell and we worked by torchlight. Then I remembered a flagon of cordial, Stir's gift to mother. That strong water brought the first signs, a breath which dulled my swordblade. Now we could feel the faint throbs of the heart and a breathing, but at the flicker of the eyelids I became afraid of his eyes. I left man and wife together and went to Brattelid.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW WORLDS FOR OLD

WITH modern Christians it is natural to confess the faith. That was always quite easy for Jews, Greeks, Latins and other impulsive southerners who like to show their strong and generous feelings. Far different was it with the shy, restrained Northmen, who make no display of feeling. In modern gentlemen of British blood will you find the old time northern character of men who feel very strongly but do not wear their hearts upon their sleeves.

Such men, while their blood is clean, do not join the Salvation Army or even the Methodists or Baptists, with whom the convert is expected to shout or groan or speak to the congregation. A northern thoroughbred confesses Christ in his deeds, not ever in his words. Being, at the worst, an Icelandic gentleman, I was not ashamed of Christ, so much as abashed of talk. I kept my mouth shut.

Our gentry in the colonies were Northmen and pagan, but the whole of our

slaves were British, and for the most part Christians. Moreover the slaves, being our equals in manhood, readily earned their freedom, so that we were intermarried and our whole people were of mixed Northman and British blood. Only a few patricians, like Eric and my mother, were of pure Norse stock, free from the slave taint.

The Christian then was either a slave or a freed-man. For a man of the royal stock to confess Christ was to lose his rank, and the fellowship of his equals, even respect of the thralls, and to become an outcast. If I did that I should play a dirty trick on Eric. In loyalty to him and to my duty I kept my mouth shut.

It was on the day I freed my thralls that I made full confession to mother.

"My son," she said, "I've been a Christian for years, but for goodness' sake don't tell Eric. And don't be bumptious about it, because we're not baptized and we're so ignorant that if we sneaked into Heaven the angels would be 'shamed. They'd feed us under the table—yes, like strayed cats, out of charity.

"The piggy would a-flying go—
In flying time, in flying time.
He flew too high, he flew too slow,
Yet was his bacon prime!"

So mother sang, telling me I was much too high and serious, taking my Christianity like toothache.

As to Harald, he laughed at me.

"Wait," he said, "until men call you Christian—they may be right."

He was forever at my elbow. I would burn the dollies on our god-shelf.

"Nay," said he, "for that means bloodshed 'twixt yourself and Eric. But if he gives the dollies a coat of paint to preserve them—he paints so very badly."

I persuaded Eric who, with deep reverence and many prayers for help, so painted the dollies that Odin looked owlish, Thor seemed to squint, Frey like a smug chapman, Uller dark of muzzle as if he drank and all the rest a little less than comic. Eric took pride in his art and naught could he see amiss; but a few years later the children were using the dollies to play ninepins.

All men louted to Eric, all women dipped a curtsey when they met him but, when I spoke of myself and my brothers as chiefs, Harald gainsaid me.

"Our Northmen," he said, "are of such a mind that they will ever be plotting against a chief until he is thrown or slain. Now hear my rede. The *Fafnir* is too old to keep the sea, so break her up for timber and buy two ships, one for your brother Thorwald, one for your brother Stein.

"With these two new ships and the *Flying Dragon* you and your brothers shall always choose which men you will have in Greenland, denying passage to brawlers, priests and lawmen and all idlers soever, selling lands only to workers.

"Keep out of your settlements the bloodstained temples and murderous assizes which are the bane of Iceland. If two men fall out, let each choose a neighbor to take his part, and the two neighbors call in an umpire. If any suitor seems unpleased with his verdict, or showeth a taste for brawling, priest-right or the law, one of your ships will visit him and give him an islet all to himself until he is contented. So will brawlers be homesick for Iceland. He who breeds mischief here shall be like a hen sitting a stone egg.

"Eric's sons shall be merchants with lands for sale, chapmen taking cargo to and fro, bankers with money or livestock on loan to settlers. Mere chiefs are pulled down and slaughtered, but you three sons of Eric shall be masters of the sea."

This rede I laid before Eric, and from that moment he placed in my charge the settlement of Greenland.

Harald would have no gifts to make men jealous of him.

"Ere the vikings captured me," he said, "when I was Earl of Man, I had all the toys that grown-ups like to play with—wealth, rank, worries, and a peevish stomach—but Christ's thralls travel light or perish ere they reach Him."

Now that my eyes were opened I could

see quite clearly how the Norse gods made men selfish, vengeful, childish in anger, mirthless in their pleasures, with terrible fits of gloom. Even Eric, greatest of all Icelandic men, was at times like a rudderless ship, with Hall the Hunter at his elbow, ever prompting him to foul speech, mean actions and abhorrent vice. The Christians were blithest among our people, mother delighting in nonsense, Patrick in brave ballads and sweet music, Michael Craftsman in beautiful handiwork, Harald Christian in shrewd, humorous advice to hold me to Christ's way.

TIME moveth slowly, yet is foreshortened as one sees it lengthwise. From the death of the veiled lady twelve brisk years went by of honest work and increasing happiness in which no great event stands out above the mists of a vague memory. We numbered then in Greenland two thousand settlers, hale, gainful, thriving folk, well ordered, as Harald said, for lack of any laws worth breaking.

Eric's mane of red gold was changed to silver now and mother hid her scanty, grizzled locks under a *faldr*. My sister Asdis was a most lovely woman, proud, cruel and fierce. Thorwald was married and had growing children. Stein had his manhood, loving all women so well that he could not ever be content with one. Patrick the Scald, Steersman Smith and Tyrkir, our German nurse-thrall, were aged and past work, three little, shrunken old men who sat round the hearth and bickered, hating each other quite fondly. When they waxed riotous in their disputes Asdis would knock their old white heads together. As to Eric and mother, they sat in their high thrones, remote from the throes of a disordered world, kindly and tolerant.

You shall know that in 999, the thousandth year of Christ's reign, men, pagan and Christian alike, expected the downfall of the northern gods. In Norway the idols were hurled from their high places, their temples given to the flames, their laws cast down by Olaf Tryggveson, the Christian king. There was unrest through all the pagan northlands, and even in far-away Greenland, where we had no news, there seemed to be faint echoes through the air.

Those of us who are outdoor men, living an unsheltered, healthy life, all know how it feels to come among indoor people and, after seafaring, land-travel, hunting or field labor, enjoy the seat by the fire, something warm to drink, a hearty supper and the glow of comfort. The folk who live indoors seem only half alive.

So was it with me after a day's hunting with Harald, as I sat in the lower throne opposite Eric's high seat and watched the three old gossips. Tyrkir, who gibbered like a little goblin, talked of the coming Götterdämmerung, or twilight falling upon the German gods. Smith, rough peasant as he was, spoke with a gloomy power which made one's skin creep, describing the Ragnarak, or age of fire and darkness. The people grouped about the long hearth listened in fear, for the old steersman had a theme which filled him with unholy joy. He made us to see the gouts of snow drift sidewise out of mist in the gray night upon a world of naked corpses.

A woman squealed and started into hysterics. The children crept away to their bunks, holding each other's hands. Smith spoke of were-wolves until we could hear them howl. He made us to see ghosts rising from that death to drift with the hurried snow by tens, by thousands, until they fled through the night like a stricken army. Then Harald whispered from behind my chair—

"When they be warmed and fed the ravens croak, and men suppose they grieve."

I watched Patrick reaching for his harp; I saw his stealthy glance to be sure that Eric nodded in the high seat. Then like a wind at sea rose the low sweet chords to which he spoke, his voice like a thread of silver in the golden music.

"The winds are dead, my masters. The nights are weary long and days dawn gray. Earth's aged, deeply wrinkled face

hath lengthening shadows and few are the dry leaves quivering still upon the tree of life. At its roots the sea dragon eateth and the branches do shudder before the coming downfall.

"The land doth tremble to the throes of earthquake, for the coils of the sea-snake fasten and lock the earth.

"Up in high Asgard the gods in awful terror, sweating blood, are laboring at their towers and gold ramparts; but fate is there, the night which hath no wakening, the death which knows no dawn—that wolf-shade yonder, slinking along the wall.

"There cometh the twilight battle, the slaughtering of nations, Armageddon. Then the trumpet shall shake the heavens, the sun shall be darkened, the moon shall not give her light, the stars shall fall before the great and terrible coming of the Lord God."

My mother stayed the whirr of her spinning wheel as if fate waited, while in the rapt silence the seer looked up through the veil of hearth smoke. He had a vision of other worlds. The music of the harp was changing to a measure of solemn triumph.

"The day shall dawn on fields of blood.
The sun shall rise on ashen dead.
O'er the burn'd land, o'er the dark flood
Lift up thy heart, lift up thy head.
The dead are rising from the grave,
For Christ hath risen, and Christ shall save!

"I tell you, my masters, that from this year there shall be wars, there shall be sorrows, and yet a widening light of clearer justice, nobler living and open truth, for Christ shall be sole king above the nations, reigning in triumph for a thousand years, until the memory of your pagan gods fades into myth and legend, dying utterly away out of men's hearts as the night passes, giving place to day."

Out of the hushed quiet I heard my mother's whisper:

"Only to think of it!" Then, with her gay little chuckle, she roused us all from the spell. "Since the old world shall die, Leif, you'd best be setting out to find the new."

Eric awakened at that.

"Aye, aye!" said he. "You keep us waiting, son, for the new world venture."

I liked that, for his word alone had kept me back twelve years from seeking this new world and getting timber to meet our bitterest need in the Greenland settlements.

"Will you lead?" I asked him.

"An it comes to that," he answered, "I grow too old and fat to endure sea hardships."

"Come," said I, "for no man has better luck than yours, and if you come we shall prosper."

He would think about it, and so no doubt would mother, whose silence was not consent.

Cried Smith—

"I shall be steersman once again."

"And I the bosun," said Patrick, blithe at the thought.

"May I come too?" asked Tyrkir.

Then Michael Crafstman and Frogan spoke up, claiming by right of their deeds at the Broadlair fight that they should serve as bowsmen.

Hotblack Smithson and Harald Christian claimed the two stroke oars. My brother Stein claimed to be forecastle man, a very humble post.

Hall the Hunter must of course be messward, and he was evil.

It stood to reason that Fatty Ulf was pilot.

So Eric gave rede that on this venture of the *Flying Dragon* the oar-shares should be reward for long and faithful service. It was a rare thing to feel how many were the men who had just claims to go. My mind was set on getting timber, but most of our thirty-five men chosen for the voyage desired the finding of a new world, in case our seer's dream come true that year and the old world be swept away.

The ship lay wintering on Ericsfiord, two miles to the north of our house, and there we dighted her. Ballast we took instead of any cargo, some provisions and water, Hotblack's stock of axes and a grindstone, but little else besides our weapons and armor. Save when we

fared to Iceland we did not wear byrnies, so that most of us were cramped and chafed by armor long disused. We wore the mail that spring, to be at ease in case we should come to battle with folk of the unknown lands.

Spring came, when the first little flowers stuck up their heads through the edges of melting snowdrifts. Then with a rush and a roar the ice broke in Einarsfiord, and a day or two later word came that Ericsfiord was clear. I was up early next morning for a swim, and on my return met Eric who carried a spade and our small cask wherein we kept the gold.

"Your mother may well be robbed," he said, "so I shall bury this," and with that went off in haste to bank the money.

We were at breakfast when he came back, had a brisk wash in the porch and entered rubbing his hands dry.

"Wife," said he, "I doubt ill luck will come of this burial."

"That may well be." Mother spoke rather sharply. "When a man mistrusts his woman, ill luck hath not far to come."

She would not fare with us beyond the porch, yet gave us her blessing there. So we set out, Eric leading upon our strongest horse, the ship's company, Asdis riding her pony, and all the folk from the house—men, maids and bairns. Some joined us from farms on the way and, when we passed the ridge, we saw that hundreds of people were gathered at the *naust* in their boats to see us off.

Uphill the horse had merely staggered under Eric's weight, but on the downhill the poor brute's knees gave way and he fell with a sudden crash.

"Ai, ai!" cried Eric. "Lift him off my leg!"

We hauled the horse clear, but my father had hurt his ankle and could not rise.

"Didn't I say that ill hap would come of the burial?" He put the hurt foot down. "Yow! It is not designed for me to discover other lands than this, nor can we continue together any longer. You'd best help me back to the saddle, but, by Thor, you'll have to carry that horse. How your mother will laugh at this! Come, help me up."

I hoisted him to the saddle and set men to support the swaying horse.

"Take the command, Leif," said he, then lifted his hand while we knelt, the whole ship's company, to have his priestly blessing.

"Now may Thor guard ye!" he cried, "and Ægir miss ye, Ran seek ye all in vain and Odin King of Heaven send fair winds."

So he rode home slowly to Brattelid, where mother made fun of his voyage for months to come. I can not say that I was sorry to have the command and the fame of that great venture.

Upon this voyage Fatty Ulf and I steered watch and watch about. Smith and Patrick were too feeble for steering; indeed their principal use was to keep a sharp lookout for mermaids, but they had power to tame the rowdy youngsters so I did call them first and second steersmen. These and Tyrkir, my body-servant, slept aft in the cabin bunks, while the rest of the people, thirty-four in all, had eighteen hammocks—a tight squeeze in the forecastle.

TAKING the departure from Ericsfiord, we set a southwesterly course, by Fatty's pilotage. A couple of days gave us landfall upon a bleak and naked coast shelving gently inland to the base of a snow-clad range. That country was not to compare with Greenland; indeed in a day's wandering ashore we saw no manner of food. Yet were there many foxes, and these impudent, so where they prospered there must be food for the seeking. Flat rocks, two man-lengths wide, littered the ground, for which I named the country Helluland—in English "Slab-land"—after its nature.

Southward we followed this coast the summer long, sailing or rowing as the wind served or failed, and putting in for rest at many havens. At times of storm or fog we would hunt, fish and explore.

I think it must have been Hamilton Inlet where we found woodlands reaching

down to the shore—poor timber, bush where mosquitoes prospered but men would starve. Belts of bark, nibbled by hungry beasts high up the tree-trunks, proved that here the winter snows lay very deep. In all this region we met Eskimos, not nearly so fat and rich as those of Greenland. We doubted therefore that the fishing was quite so good here as in our colony. The soil was frozen far into the summer, and meadows few and small showed little hope that either stock or crops would thrive in Helluland.

There were more sounds, firths and inlets than we had time to enter, and passing by, we thought Newfoundland to be part of the mainland whose jutting out to Cape Race had to be rounded. Only upon our homeward passage we found the short-cut through the Gulf of St. Lawrence which saved us three hundred miles.

It was to Nova Scotia and Maine that I gave the name of Markland, "Woodland," after the nature of that country. Here the drear pines gave place to leafy woodlands of trees all strange to us and marvelous hard withal, which broke our axes. The summer warmth was now increased upon us, so that we took the risk of shedding armor to go half-clad or naked when we fared inland on our exploring trips. Here were delicate flowers and bushes white with blossom. As to the humming birds and canaries, we could not believe our eyes. The woods were filled with bird-song, while the frogs had much to say of an evening.

Some of the insects were quite unnatural. Who could ever have imagined the striped creatures—snakes, squirrels and pole-cats? Truly the savor of the pole-cat is most surprizing. One of our dogs got some of the perfume upon him and also a thrall of Eric's, Sigurd Grump, so we left them both behind to enjoy the same. It was a pity we must lose the dog, but we were much heartened at being reft of Grump, gone sour years ago and dismal beyond endurance.

To make amends we took a little funny bear called Grump, with a sound appetite but no table manners, who neglected proper food to bite his mess-mates. I never knew a pet to bite so many people, but when he wore a muzzle he grew more popular.

Oysters we found, marvelously armored yet seemingly weaponless, so soft that we confided much in them, yet in the summer season they wreaked vengeance and proved a most potent medicine, in that they flattened out our able seamen. The salmon and trout proved mighty sportsmen, besides being comforting to the hungry.

We all grew fat and lazy in the havens of Markland, for none of us had seen any land so rich, fertile and sunny. Only Patrick would talk of Erin where oysters the size of a dinghy would swallow a man at one gulp, frogs made the ground to quake with their rude oaths, trees combed out the tresses of tall clouds, salmon would rise to no bait less than a goat and humming-birds, much the same size as a flying cow, were always a positive nuisance in the evening.

Only the wonder strands had Patrick humble, for truly these beaches seemed a marvel to us who thought that a mile of sandy shore was quite unheard of. Still they reminded Patrick of a beach in Africa about a month's journey long, which swarmed with crocodiles, each about the size of our ship, whose breath was foul, choking the whales at sea on which they breakfasted. He was most sincere about that, for being a Christian man he felt himself bound and holden to all kinds of truthfulness.

AT THE season when berries were ripening, we sailed through sounds abreast of the main sea, which ended in a spacious tract of tidal water. This firth branched to the northward into two arms like the mouths of rivers. Between them lay an island about six miles long—low, rocky, rather sterile, with poor timber. Southward it narrowed to a point within which we found an haven for our ship. Ashore, as in many places on that coast, we found ashes of camp fires, framework

for booths, sheets and baskets of birch-bark, rags of deerskin clothing, broken bits of stone spear and arrow-points, axes and scrapers, bones of fish and beasts.

I think the people must have lived inland, for we never saw them, and that they sometimes spent a season in camp on the coast. By the wreckage of frame canoes covered with birch-bark we knew that they traveled by water; yet from this camp a strong trail went up the ridge of the island on which I took my starboard watch some miles without finding game. That trail was Broadway, our camp was at the Battery, the island was Manhattan, the firth was New York harbor.

Had we no dreams that night? Certainly not of cities. Old Patrick was the only man among us who had seen one. You might as well expect modern New Yorkers to dream of rugged Northmen beaching a viking ship at Castle Garden.

We supped on crabs and they haunted us. We made a birchen fire for light to keep off crocodiles and dragons, should any be about. We were frightened by the shortness of the days now in midsummer when there should not be any night. We were appalled by the lone, vast, unpeopled wilderness, where no sound broke through the silence except the howls of wolves. We were lonely, homesick. Smith had seen fireflies and feared the worst. He told us of certain gnomes who carry lanterns to light men to their graves.

Children know that though the way ahead looks dull and commonplace all sorts of wonders may be lurking just round the corner. Dragons, fairies, princesses, fiery serpents and all manner of unnatural-history animals inhabit the country round the corner, waiting to be discovered by bold adventurers.

My seamen were like children in the dark who take a sudden fright of round-the-corner land. I was the grown-up explorer not to be frightened by fireflies, but ready to lose my life rather than miss that something lost waiting behind the skyline. I sat with my back to the fire, peering out through the starlight, trying to catch the sound of that voice which hath no echo, calling me on from the depths of the Jersey swamps.

But all the time at my ear was the voice of reason, Harald Christian's voice.

"Wasn't it timber we came for? I don't think much of these woods, do you? There was that cedar grove you may remember, four hundred miles nearer home. Good timber that, for building ships, housen and furniture. Fragrant withal, eh? Now if we wintered there we'd have a shipload home in the early summer, saving a season."

Only a month ago my seamen had been merry, care-free, making the woods of Markland ring with their fun. Now they were dull, sluggish, reluctant, homesick, just like the *Fenris'* crew which marooned me on an isle in northern Greenland.

There was the voice of reason at my ear:

"Too hot for sleep, eh? And out on the sound there's a cool breeze all night. Why not?"

A southerly breeze, night sailing to the northward. Running away? Never!

Again came the voice of reason:

"Don't you remember the big trail running inland from the cedars, the glowing ashes left by the folk who fled? If we could find them—"

I turned to my seamen.

"What say you," I asked them, "about turning homeward?"

"Oh, aye," said Fatty Ulf.

The rest sat stunned, until a man nudged his neighbor who grinned and passed a whispered word in doubt.

"Will ye be meaning that?" asked Patrick.

Tyrkir let out one of his demon whoops, then several spoke at once, many jumped to their feet, and of a sudden all of them cheered like mad:

"Thor aid! Thor aid! Thor aid!"

According to custom Patrick had spent the afternoon in camp to blaze a large tree and carve runes thereon, setting forth our claim to the country by right of discovery. These runes he stayed to finish by firelight while we broke camp and got the ship afloat.

Now as she took the tide and men were splashing about her there befel a great marvel. All of us were used to see some little phosphorescence, but here the water, as we stirred it, flashed with sparkles of fire, numberless as the stars, in a green blaze which lighted up ship and people brighter than strong moonlight. When we were ready Patrick came to our shouting, and after he climbed aboard stood on the break of the poop.

"Shipmates, is it remembering ye are? What was my rede long years back when Leif was so high, sitting on Eric's knee in Ax Isle. What was it?"

Tyrkir chirped back at him:

"A longship fares on seas afire.
A son shall dare beyond desire;
And nations unto Christ-realm won
Shall bless thy name—Leif, Eric's son."

"Now," said Patrick, "see our longship cleave these fiery waters, and mark you how Leif has dared this journey many days beyond the limits of our desire. Look at the great world-riding here discovered with room enough for nations as many and great as those of Europe. When these lands are won for Christ's realm and filled with Christ's folk, think you that they'll forget Leif Ericson?"

At that our people fell into two sides, the pagan and the Christian, each part claiming me; until I bade them shut their mouths and get their hands to work upon our journey.

A WEEK later, and four hundred miles to the northward, we made landfall at the heads of a roomy bay. Within this we did pass between two half-isles destined to be the sites of Boston and Charleston, and so came to an inner harbor. There was the mouth of a river, now called the Charles, which we entered, being then quite weary of the sea and resolved to winter well out of sight thereof. A little way up the northern or Cambridge bank of the river we came to the low point made by Symonds Hill beside a creek in the salt marsh. There is hard below the point of the hill, which is called Gerry's Landing, and on this we hauled our ship aground for winter quarters.

In all our voyages we found no better camp-ground than this low, sunward slope overlooking the creek with its shelter from bleak winds and its trickle of sweet water. Round us were open pastures, with a good farm of standing corn sown by the native people who lay in camp there for their harvesting. The openings of the woods were full of wild fruits, quite new to us, and clumps of fruit trees under the shelter of great standing timber. Behind were swamps full of cedars with a good slope for haulage to the ship. Within these woods we should not lack meat with our hunting.

Moreover, the waters were teeming with big salmon, easily trapped. There were oysters, clams, scallops, lobsters and crabs.

We called the Red Indians "Skrellings," savages, and they doubtless had some such name for us. Though they outnumbered us by two men to one, my seamen were minded to kill them all for fun, while they supposed they could catch us in some ambush and have our ship for plunder. I saw nothing to be gained from either of these plans. So while both sides, arrayed in order of battle, were busy being rude to each other, I recalled the sign-talk of the Eskimos, and presently called for silence. Standing in front of my men I had Harald Christian take my helmet, byrnie and weapons, then made the peace sign, crossed over to the Indian chief and offered my hand in friendship.

This Beaver Tail was an elderly man, well knit, good looking, save for the loss of one of his eyes in battle—a gentleman in his quietude and most gracious manners, naked withal save for a breechclout of beaver fur and a copper breastplate. He wore his long hair in plaits down either breast. His face was painted with much design and care in red, black and yellow.

Between the rival parties we sat down and puffed at his tobacco pipe by turns, fine stuff. I am proud to have been the

first white man who ever smoked a pipe.

It was not in one lesson that I mastered the sign language of the red Indians, but I explained to the chief in gestures that he would be wise to send his women up country before my people made too free with them. His answer was the closing of an eye, and the wink of a one-eyed man is monstrous solemn.

It is ill-bred to smile at an Indian powwow.

Next I made presents, and the chief matched gift with gift. The last of his gifts was rendered with prayers and ceremonies, a belt of shell beads with a queer design of beasts which was the sacred symbol of a treaty such as no Indian tribe has ever broken. I wore this belt and gave mine to the chief.

It was in matching of gifts that I found out the values set upon our goods, a beaver-skin being worth one iron nail. So trade began which lasted through the winter, for parties of the Indians went far afield to buy furs for our bartering. I stripped the *Flying Dragon* of every metal scrap which could be safely spared, then set up the forge to make our iron ballast into weapons.

It was quite safe to sell the Indians swords which they could not wield, arrow and spear-points which could not pierce our mail. At the same time I had the chief's own son as hostage, while Harald Christian went to live with the Indians. Moreover I made my seamen a faithful promise to hang the first man who cheated, robbed or hurt one of the Indians. And Beaver Tail was pledged to kill in my presence any of his subjects who stole our goods.

By request of Smith, his father, I kept Hall the Hunter for one month in irons, hoping to mend his manners, but on the Indians' side there was no fault. I think of them as poor gentlefolk and of ourselves as rich savages. As to the issue of our trading, it filled the cabin and forecastle compact with bales of black and silver and common foxes, beaver, muskrat and many other furs, enough to make each oar-share yield a fortune. Only second to that in value was our store of wild rice and tobacco, willow leaves—whose tea cures rheumatism—sassafras, sarsaparilla and other native drugs. Very precious also was the sap of maple trees, the first sugar which white men ever tasted.

We bought such corn as the Indians could spare from their crop, as also sun-dried strawberries, huckleberries, raspberries and cranberries, all stored in birch-bark and wicker baskets, which with some native matting fetched a high price in Greenland.

So much for our cargo bought with a little scrap metal, which made our Indians the richest and best armed tribe in all that region.

This trading employed Smith and Patrick, men too old for labor; the forge kept Hotblack Smithson, Michael Craftsman and Tyrkir busy on trade weapons. The rest of us wrought night and day laying in winter stores of smoked salmon and other fish, venison, beaver and hares. We gathered mussel bait and took cod when the sea-fishing began to be good towards Yuletide. In all we had plenty of food, not only for wintering and sea stores, but some over for trade, wherewith we bought from the Indians their useful inventions such as webbed snow-shoes and mocassins. From them too we learned their arts in dressing skins, making clay pipes, gut bowstrings and sinew for sewing. We tried their ball game also, played and beat them. In wrestling they oiled their bodies and beat us.

IT WAS our custom to work in gangs, well armed, and no man was allowed to stray alone from camp. So I was angered when on an autumn day, Tyrkir was missing. Vowing to have his skin torn off and stuffed, I led a party in search of the old fool; but we were not far gone into the woods when we found him to all appearance mad. He wore a chaplet of leaves; he was laden with bunches of some strange fruit; his goggle eyes were starting from his head. He babbled at us in German and looked

more like a little old goblin than ever. We all laughed until we had to sit down.

"How now, foster-father?" I asked him at last. "Are you bewitched?"

"My son," said he, affronted into talking Norse, "if you were not an ignorant young savage, you'd know this fruit and praise the gods as I do. Grapes! Grapes! Vineyards of wild grapes! This is Vineland! Thor Aid for Vineland the Good!"

So he named this region Vineland the Good, which is the best country on the earth, excepting Tyrkir's claim that Germany is better and Patrick's boasts concerning holy Erin. It seemed to us Northmen very Paradise, and yet they call New England poor and sterile compared with old England, albeit both Englands seem to breed right men.

Patrick, the far-traveled, had tasted wine in his youth, but must have taken too much, so hazy was his memory thereof. The rest of us were content to have Tyrkir's word that these were grapes he had found, with wine to follow. All of us set to gathering the fruit, and making a birch-bark trough wherein men barefoot, well-washen, trod out the juice. This flowed to a birch-bark vat where it fermented. At this stage Tyrkir made proof, being very drunk indeed with bilious attack complete, but I restrained the rest, since drinking would be perilous in a camp where we were outnumbered by strange savages. We filled our water-casks, excepting three, with wine, all the better for keeping. The rest of the grapes we sun-dried into raisins.

In line with the grounded ship and close against her bows we built a long-house about the size of Brattelid. It was only a rough barn, pine-framed, roofed with birch-bark, walled with stakes from the hewn cedar of our cargo, in all a good enough winter camp and warehouse. At the end toward the ship was a house for Grump the bear, who spent his time in sleep and his waking hours trying the bite the sentry up on the forecastle head. He could reach just high enough to have his nose smacked.

Our main grievance was the winter, for the snow was gone so soon that we had to haul our timber on rough ground. And then was I sorely puzzled. When we launched and loaded the ship, the cargo filled her with precious furs, tobacco, sugar, drugs, wine, fruit and sea stores until we had no space for the load of timber which was our main enterprise. To carry the cedar wood I had to build it as a sheathing outside the hull, a bulwark, and a hurricane deck over all, but we should have needed a squadron to take all the wealth we won, and were constrained to leave the bulk of our timber behind.

It is a wonder to me when I read of the Puritans who in a later age starved where we fattened, grew poor where we made our fortunes, cursed the winter we thought too mild and fought the natives we found so useful as allies.

CHAPTER IX

SQUIRREL

THERE was a lass called Squirrel, daughter of Beaver Tail, not at all pretty but quaint and pert as you please, with dimples at the corners of her twisty whimsical mouth and eyes like the dancing firelight. This nut-brown maid wore a frock of yellow deerskin, 'broidered with colored quills and shiny sea-shells, a ruff of brown fur at her neck, and on her feet small, dainty moccasins. She hunted butterflies through swathes of goldenrod and briar roses, light as a puff of thistledown on the wind, seeming to us no more than a child at play.

The women were gone, but she stayed to make friends with my seamen. She made faces at them and impudent mimicry, picked up our northern speech, the bad words first, and taught Grump how to climb from his pen for a bite at the sentry's legs. She made fun of our poor bush-craft, calling us Thunder Feet for the noise we made in the woods where her people glide like spirits.

When men were hurt she would heal them with native herbs, or when they were well would make them feel much

better. She managed and mothered both her tribe and mine, without the slightest respect for any of us. I supposed she had no heart, but was just like a woodland fairy without a soul.

The wanton, wayward maid used men for playthings, with such a witchery that she had Tyrkir proud of his good looks and made snarling Hall the Hunter suppose that his voice was music. As to handsome, gentle old Patrick, she snubbed him without mercy.

At the Indian town, up inland—a fortified well ordered burg, with civic police, and fine schooling in arms for the youngsters—I noticed that the girls were most demure. And so was the Squirrel, well-mannered, shy, and diffident, but to me alone, making me keep my distance, while to all men else she was a romping little devil of blithe mischef. Men did me credit for a commanding presence, whereof, the maid gave a fine pantomime, prancing behind me, with my men for audience in a roar of laughter. That was no harm. I was content to let her go her way, if I might have mine in peace, but if she disdained me so, and flouted me with my back turned, why need she bother herself to keep me in sight for miles through the far woodlands?

I could not leave the camp but she must be darting swift and silent as a little sun-ray over the snow to hide behind a tree, or peek at me over a log. Then, as I floundered nearer, off she fluffed, just like the other squirrels. Thus, hiding and scuttering by turns, she led me on, and if the maid wanted a game I was no spoil-sport. If she could run where I waded in the snowdrifts, it was surely her fault if I won. Nor wo ld it have been in nature to let the minx go without paying forfeit of a hug or a kiss. She chattered and swore, but at all times she cuddled.

She blew in a frightful rage, but did not try for freedom however she was rumpled. She shrieked for help, but had both arms round my neck. Did she hate me so very much with her mouth? Her eyes devoured me. If what she said was angry, all that she did spelt love.

After that flurry we were sitting side by side on a fallen tree, when I told the Squirrel she was a shameless flirt. She nodded and said she had not done so badly as the old witch woman foretold. Indeed she preened herself, and said she had done pretty well.

On that an arrow came whizzing and splintered on my helmet.

"That's Brooding Owl," she told me. "He my lover. I waken him up. He kill."

So that was the game.

A second arrow missed, and I picked it up, not a good shaft or well pointed.

A third arrow caught in my byrnie.

"You no fear?" she asked.

"Why should I?" For what were these poor arrows against my steel?

The Squirrel stood up and shouted, bidding her lover stop, but for answer his fourth arrow clave through her hair.

"He no love?" she whimpered, crouching beside me for shelter.

She was well frightened now, while shaft after shaft whizzed by or caught my armor, until poor Brooding Owl spent his last arrow. On that I bade him run away and play, for I was busy, but could not see the Indian in his covert and had no mind to wade like a fool in pursuit of a light-footed savage. And the Squirrel needed me also, nestling in my arms to tell me all her troubles. Dearly, it seemed, did she love Brooding Owl, but he was so stupid. If the Owl merely wanted a woman to sit by while he sulked, he had not chosen wisely.

FROM this time the Squirrel was shy but friendly, expecting me to make atonement between herself and the Owl. He would have no more to do with the flirt, cried off the match and therein showed the glimmerings of reason. As to my helping her to run away with the Owl, I said it was none of my business. At that she took high offense, walking off with her nose in the air.

How this little lady managed I never knew, but when a woman sets all her heart upon a project she usually has her

way, so in due time the Squirrel caught and married her Owl. She would. She did. But why? Not for the sake of Brooding Owl, his love—he had refused point blank. Not to fulfill her pledge to marry him, since that promise would be only a fence for jumping. Not for her father's wishes—she defied him from force of habit. Not for any gain—the Owl was poor. In later days she made confession that at first sight she loved me, was altogether possessed with love which tied her to me despite her maidenly pride, took away all her freedom, left her bound and humbled.

Her fierce free spirit resented such a bondage, revolted against love's high dominion over her. At all costs she would tear herself free. And then I failed to take her seriously, treated her as a child to be played with, slighted her. So she resolved to show me how little she cared, that I was naught to her, and never could be more. No matter how much it hurt her, if only it hurt me a little. She married the Owl to spite me.

It could not end there. The Squirrel felt it was now my turn to move, to slay her Owl and capture her by force. So she sent word bidding me to her marriage feast, a challenge. But it was not for me or any other dull-witted male creature to read her subtle mind or understand her turbulent heart. My business was to look after my seamen and keep them from being embroiled with savages. I sent a wedding present, and promised myself that I would think no more of this disturbing matter but do my work, of which there was plenty in waiting.

This maid who, for spite, pique, or to read me a lesson, lightly wedded the Owl, must have forgotten the fact that owls eat squirrels, make a diet of them and think no more of one than we do of a boiled egg. For all she had flouted him in her gay freedom, the Owl, come to his own, had plentiful vengeance; that she endured him for a month did credit to her pluck. Not that she ever could while he lived, cry off the bargain, or get succor from her father, or any of her people. They would merely have called her dissolute and fetched her back to the Owl. So when she fled, my camp was her only refuge, my protection her only hope.

She had naught to say about the Owl, nothing concerning her people, only the poor excuse of coming to look after her brother, our hostage, locked in the forecastle under guard. Yet were the weals, bruises, actual wounds and piteous breaking down of her gay spirit more eloquent to plead for her than any amount of talk. She came to me broken. So when Smith, Patrick, Ulf, Tyrkir and all wiseacres, would have me send the woman to her father, lest she embroil us in war with the Skrellings, they found me firm and called me obstinate. I locked poor Squirrel with her brother in the forecastle.

It stood to reason that Brooding Owl, uproarious for vengeance, would track the Squirrel and raise his tribe against us for harboring his runaway wife. There was no need, then, for them to send for Beaver Tail. I launched the ship, got the best part of our cargo aboard and put her in a state of defense before the tribe arrived. They had with them their hostage, Harald Christian, whom they lashed to a tree, making a pyre about him to kindle, unless I yielded up the Squirrel.

In reply, I set my hostage, her brother, on the poop with a rope about his neck and over the masthead, so he was in a fair way of being hanged if Harald complained of the warmth. Beaver Tail saw the point of this argument as concerning his son, and came to the beach for parley. I asked him how many lives he reckoned to pay for Brooding Owl's runaway wife.

He wanted a night to think the matter over.

"Loose your hostage," said I, pointing to Harald. "Send him aboard, or I shall hang your son."

He did so, forgetting to claim his son in exchange.

Then I brought the Squirrel up to the poop.

"This," said I, "is Brooding Owl's runaway woman. Where's Brooding Owl?"

He was not in the forefront of this battle.

"Fetch him," said I, "tell him to come for his woman. He shall meet me on even terms, naming the weapons. The Squirrel shall stand behind me, and if this Owl can get her, no man of mine will deny him."

The Squirrel was proud. The Squirrel was pleased. She was to be fought for at holmgang, almost as good as a battle. Her pose was mournful, haggard, tragic, but as she was not quite tall enough, she climbed on a coil of rope and looked the part.

But the Owl was not forthcoming.

"Come," said I, "this is all talk and no sport." Then I spoke to Beaver Tail, and his tribe. "Your journey is wasted. Have you come here merely to go back again? If the Owl is not a man, can not play the man, if he behaves like a woman—why, catch him, dress him up as a squaw and set him to squaw's work."

Still was the Squirrel purring with joy and pride, while the people accepted my rede, many of them departed in search of Brooding Owl, whom presently they found. They stripped him of his man-clothes, made a squaw of him, hunted him down and brought back his scalp for me. It was thrown on board, passed aft from hand to hand, until it reached me, and I gave the thing to Squirrel. She threw it down and wiped her feet upon her husband's scalp. Then she did let me see that she expected me to claim her as my wife, and that I might have done had I been free. Yet well I knew that at all costs I must prevent the outbreak of war with the Indians. It was my honor to bring my seamen home to Brattelid, and not to waste their lives on any affair of my own. I called to Squirrel's father:

"Beaver Tail, I give you greeting. This woman, the widow of Brooding Owl was once your daughter. Do you claim her?"

"Aye."

The Squirrel came down from her coil quite out of curl.

"How could you?" she muttered in her own language. "Ugh!" Anger leapt astride of outraged pride. "You beast!"

So far as I can fathom it seems to me that the Squirrel liked to be fought for, captured, or even stolen, but not to be sold or given. Nothing cared she if her own people and mine were slaughtered in battle. Now she was left like a tragedy queen among comedians. I offered great gifts to her father if I might have her, and I could see well that Beaver Tail smacked his lips at the thought of all he would get by such a bargain as this.

But Squirrel stamped at me, said I had proved a disappointment, a cur, a worm and several other disagreeable animals; I told her privily that she deserved to be smacked, at which she flew into a royal rage, defied me, cursed me and jumped overboard. She swam to her father ashore, and came to him wet, draggled, demanding war with the white men. The poor chief led her away, and so the Squirrel's voice died slowly into the distance, until it was lost among the many other sounds of the wild forest. Then the Indians, in their grave way, smiled and the seamen laughed out loud; but my heart ached a good deal during the days that followed.

The more completely a man's heart is broken, the less can it resist the attacks of love. So the veiled lady left me very liable. As to the women I met in the next dozen years, they were all nice, some rather more so, but none of them exciting. Then came the Squirrel, and whether as maid, wife or widow, she was never dull for a moment, always unexpected, surprizing and impossible. That a woman should want her own way is reasonable, that she should have her way is natural, that she should grab the opposite is just Squirrel. Because she loved me, she married the Owl, fled from him to my arms, and defied me for wanting to wed her after the way of her people. And so she called me a fool.

I set about my work dighting the ship for our passage home to Greenland, but day by day more firmly was I resolved upon the Squirrel as the only woman I

had ever really loved. The only love? That is the symptom of the worst attacks.

How time belittles the affairs which, in their day, seemed to fill all our world! That flaming riotous passion, as I look back upon it, seems so far off, so small, of no more import than the match which lights my pipe. God must be amused with us, as we are by the vagaries of white mice.

SPRING came, and with it the Indians to plant their cornfield. Beaver Tail told us how the Squirrel tried to persuade them that we, their pale-faced visitors, were ghosts, likely to bring bad luck, sickness and death. The best thing to do, said she, was a proper killing, and for her share of the plunder she would have my scalp to make a frock for dancing. But when this plot of hers reached Beaver Tail, who knew right well that his own son, Squirrel's brother, would be the first man killed, he gave her a good beating. And now she had disappeared.

On that I released my hostage, the chief's son, and sent him in search of his sister.

And so came the last of all our days in Wineland, with the ship laden, watered, manned and ready for departure. The native women were planting corn in the field. The children along the foreshore gravely hunted crabs, too proud to shriek when they got bitten, absorbed and business-like. The men exchanged farewell presents with my people, furs for a little food. They were an improvident folk and spring would always find them somewhat pinched.

Toward noon of that lowering day, when Steersman Ulf reported the watering finished, I bade him shove off, and stood to bid farewell to all my people. As for me, I would stay and help Beaver Tail in the search for his daughter, for life was worthless if I lost the Squirrel.

Then was there sore dismay among the seamen, while the wiseacres—Patrick, Smith, Tyrkir and Ulf—talked in chorus and I stood listening. They liked me a little, but they loved my luck which brought them all their welfare. They said the ship would change with any one else in command and, laden as she was now, they feared the sea. Indeed, I was like to be kidnaped and brought aboard by main force, when Harald Christian besought them to let him speak with me. He came down the gangplank, and took me into our empty house where we should be alone.

In the marooning of Grump for smelling of polecat, Harald had been most reasonable. Now he became a bigot.

"Down on your knees," he said, "say your prayers. See if you'll dare face Christ when you desert your duty."

I set about it just to prove him wrong, but the prayer stuck in my throat.

"Clear proof," said Harald, "that you're a coward."

On that there was naught left for me but to board the ship, and with what face I could to take command. Because he had no right to bully me, his captain, Harald and I were not on speaking terms; indeed I had but little to say within the first three days to him or any man. I should have killed him, but for a certain pride in being a Christian and not a common pagan like my father. Besides, I had tried before and got the worst of it.

"Death is a coward," said Harald, "and hardly dares attack a man in his manhood."

Now in a dour mood I fought the ship, which seemed possessed of devils. So great was the burden of timber built outside her for lack of room within, so high her free-board now she had deck and bulwarks, that she went sidewise, turned round and looked at us, attempting to broach to and drown us in the strong seaway of a spring southwester.

For my own fault I blamed her, because it pleased me to be in the wrong and spite Harald. Childish was that, but a man can not be in a temper without lapsing back into childhood. Then I began to feel in my bones the terror of the seamen, the fear which possessed a very willing ship. The sail seemed too far aft. Why not set canvas forward to show the ship which

way she ought to run? I slung an oar athwart the forestay, hung canvas from it and found that the *Flying Dragon* began to answer the helm. But second thoughts are best, so I made instead a staysail, fore and aft canvas, the first, perhaps, which Northmen ever used.

The ship felt better. And after that my people thought I had taken leave of my senses, for I set the awning goose-winged on the waving tailpiece. The little ship steered sweetly, balanced, safe from being pooped. By that time I had quite forgotten to mourn for my lost Squirrel.

In the loom of the fourth dawn, I was heading for land because we needed to refill our casks. I had no thought in my head apart from seamanship. There if you please came the Squirrel, crawling up the poop ladder, nearly carried away as the ship rolled, half drowned as we shipped a lump of sea along the larboard oar banks, green with sickness, draggled, utterly miserable, yet in a forlorn way still her defiant self. Scrambling up the poop, disgusted because I could not leave my post lest the ship broach and founder, she made shift to perch upon the tiller, balance and swing her legs. She looked up at me with a wan grin.

"I think," she said in her own tongue, "I hate you worse than ever."

"What do you here? Don't you see that your father will think I stole you and make war when I come again? Do you care naught that blood must be shed for this? That men must die—your friends, your kin?"

"Too much talk," she answered in broken Norse. "Me all dead," she sniffed, trying not to cry. "Ship she go swoosh, bang, whoop! She go to —— all the time. ——! Now you make stop the ship!" Her face changed, she burst out crying.

The Squirrel had stowed away, made a nest among the fur bales in the cabin, where she feasted upon nuts and drank water from her gourd until the ship, so she said, turned upside down and she turned inside out. Then she spent three days confessing all her sins, for they were many. Then she came out; and it was all my fault.

My medicine was strong, which stole the heart from her body. To get away from my magic she set her lover to kill me. She married him to get away from me and deserted him because that was my fault also. She gave herself to me and I would not have her. She ran away, and I would not pursue. She set her people to kill me but they had hearts of water.

"But love is strong," she said in her own language, "and I am weak. So now of course I'll have to marry you, or what will your sailors think? It's all your fault."

On that she sobbed her heart out because her mother was dead and she an orphan.

And so she married me.

Now, I must tell you what Harald Christian said.

"When love blows a hurricane, the strongest man is blinded, deafened, stunned, but women are altogether swept away as Squirrel was.

"In any healthy man's life love is but one of several interests, because a man is earth-bound. And yet to many a woman love is all, the one great fact filling the whole of her days. She is not earth-bound altogether, or creature of the earth.

"We are like clouds wind-driven, 'twixt love on high, and earth below; but while earth calls the man, love calls the woman, for she is love-bound, creature of the heavens where love reigns omnipotent.

"Christ, which is love visible, hath given you this woman. In His name do her worship."

TO BE CONTINUED

The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all Meeting-Place *for* Readers, Writers *and* Adventurers

OUR Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit *of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.*

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THIS letter came in too late for the original discussion, but anything said at Camp-Fire about guns and gun-play can be relied upon to start two or three new discussions, so that pretty soon the original discussion doesn't matter anyway. Some one says something and at once some one else rises to say he's all wrong.

Atlanta, Georgia.

Interested in the exchange between Messrs. Tilden and LeMay regarding six-guns. Both have ground for their point of view. But for accuracy and speed in an emergency when it's you or the other fellow, give me the good old single six every time. It's one of the reasons I am able to sit up and write this, thank you.

Since the initial number of *Adventure* I have been a follower of the Trail and a sitter-in at the Camp Fire. It has afforded me much amusement to read some of the things written, doubtlessly in good faith, about gun-play and work.

My side gun was a forty-one on a forty-five mount—an old Remington single six, with a long barrel. She was a sweet baby and threw as straight as a rifle. One shot stopped any man it hit.

These guns, like the Colt, were hung with a true balance. One drew and cocked simultaneously; it was automatic, this cocking—reflex from training and use. No time was lost and much accuracy gained. The kick of a six-gun, properly held, threw it up a bit on the discharge, so that successive

cocking for repeat shots was swift, easy and distinctive. The pull was easy, the weight of the weapon offsetting any slicing or draw on its discharge or trigger pull.

When I first went into the old West around 1900, I carried proudly a gift gun, a thirty-eight, S. &. W., rated as a "hair trigger" and having double action. It was never accurate—for me. I traded it for drinks up in the Okanagon district just before the Hedley, B. C., gold rush. Won the forty-four at dice. It had then seen much service, enough to wear off the nickel at the mouth of the barrel. (It was a white gun with walnut handle.)

Carried it for years into Mexico, Texas, California, Arizona, and it spoke effectively a number of times in the border territory. Oddly enough, it disappeared while I was in a $10 room in a Philadelphia hotel. Long as it was, I wore it from the shoulder even in New York City. To Easterners it was "a young cannon." It had the right-hand throw-out and load, with punch ejector. But as I kept it well oiled and rarely had the gun so hot that the cylinder boiled, the ejection was easy and rapid. I oiled the belt cartridges, rather than greased them, and found that speeded loading. Also made it a point to handle all shells frequently, keeping them shiny and smooth, wnich also helped speed.

Once in a Chicago Loop hock shop I went for meal money and put up the gun. "Let's see it," said the loan shark. Unconsciously, I made the quick draw and flipped the gun at the man. "Oi, oi, such a t'ing! Vy, it's loaded!" he croaked. His eyes bulged, his mouth dropped and he gagged. "Vat you vant?" "Five bucks." "Too much. I buy it for $5." (It was against the regulations to "loan" on a gun in the loop then.) "Five bucks—loan!" He looked at the gun. I got the five. Had it been a double-action modern, or an automatic, I'd probably been lucky to get a buck. There's a lot more merit in a real gun of the old type than a mere pistol.

Any man who was familiar with the good old six-gun, hardly considers the automatics or double-actions worthy. I rate this not only on my own experience but on the word of adventurers who have been through the wild and woolly days and hang over into the bucolic present in the West. For instance, Harry McPhaul, one of the old boys of the San Simon days in Arizona, familiar at Tombstone and Tucson in "the good old days."

Harold Bell Wright once told me at Tucson that there were more real stories of the West to be picked up among the old-timers hanging around Tucson than the magazines could print.

It seems to have escaped the notice of writers that this wearing guns in a holster, even tied down, was not nearly as fast as the "shirt draw." Most of the fast men I knew wore them thus. And they had speed on the pull—much. Most of the effective field peace officers along the border wear the six-gun under the vest at the waist, or inside the shirt; *i.e.*, men who are out for business purposes with a gun. It is built on the cross draw, which seems fastest. A gun in the air must be pulled, or "thrown" down. The cross draw with the single six is a pull to position, cocking and shooting in a single reflex. It's buried numbers of gentlemen, estimable and otherwise, who depended on a holster pull and flip to cover or shoot.

I believe that any one can demonstrate the superior speed and accuracy of the single six against the pistol to his own satisfaction if he will use an old Remington or Colt with the navy grip as against any of the modern models, even the "police specials." The latter models may account for the shooting done by so many police officers and the non-fatal work of the thugs in a pinch. A double-action would have to be filed down pretty close to ease the pull for real results. It isn't the weight of a gun that makes or mars the draw, but it's balance—the way it's hung, if you get what I mean.

Of course no six-gun "breaks." Some of the later models had a throw-out cylinder, for those who liked that sort of thing. But the simplest was the right-hand gate load. Simplicity counts, especially in a heavy caliber; of the lighter ones I know little or nothing.

For Mr. LeMay's benefit, I'll say that the cocking of the old six-gun did not waste a split second on the draw as the thumb did the work *during the draw*. Thereafter, the thumb rolled the trigger instinctively, faster than a double-action.—Reed Robinson.

And here is another letter, attached to the other when they were drawn from our cache.

Holywood, California.

I noticed in the latest *Adventure* that R. T. Tilden takes exception to a few points in Alan LeMay's story.

I've monkeyed quite a bit with a six though I'm not much at paper targets. I've gotten most of my practise on small game and tin cans thrown and made to bound along the ground.

I agree with Mr. LeMay about cocking the gun on the pull. I always do, though I use a .38 Colt Army Special mostly. My thumb catches the hammer as my fingers catch the butt. It's much more sure, and just as quick once you get the hang of it.

Also, the expression of "breaking" a swing-out cylinder gun on an S. A. may not be correct but it is used pretty generally. I use it myself. Haven't you ever heard it used, Mr. Tilden? You do break the gun just as literally as you break a tip-up. You throw out the cylinder which makes the gun two pieces (almost) alle samee tip-up. On an S. A. you throw out the gate. Also you can literally break it by taking out the cylinder completely.

Well, there's my say. Only thing it seems kind of funny to have a man jump on an author about an incident, etc., when the author probably (not always of course) knows the most about it. Proved in this case by Mr. Tilden's ignorance about the improved accuracy and no loss of speed by cocking a gun by the thumb.—B. M. Dack (Signed).

REMEMBER the mysterious gas used in a war story by Larry Barretto in our November 23rd issue, a gas that was used near the end of the war and whose effects were seen by Mr. Barretto himself? We asked whether any comrade could shed more light on the question of why the Germans, with so fatal a weapon in their hands and with their cause close to collapse, did not make general use of it. Here is one suggestion from an Army officer and the circumstances seem to warrant his request that his name be not published.

Fitzsimons General Hospital,
Denver, Colorado.

I have been a reader of *Adventure* since it was first published and have always followed the discussion in "Camp-Fire" with the greatest interest. In reading one of your late issues I ran across your request for information about the gas that was used by the Germans on the Vosges front. While, of course, I can not be certain that the gas I have in mind is the one used yet it is very probable because it answers perfectly to the meager description available. The information obtained herein I received from a very eminent chemist, now Dean of the Colorado School of Mines, who, during the war, was in charge of experimental work for the Chemical Warfare Service and either made this gas himself or supervised its manufacture.

Shortly after the inception of gas warfare the French and British experimented with a gas made from an arsenic base which seemed to be ideal for the purpose of causing great casualties among the enemy. It was very heavy, odorless, dispersed with difficulty, was very lethal even in small quantities and no known mask filtered it entirely. Small quantities were made as an experiment and placed in shells and other containers but it was found that after a few days these exploded spontaneously and that the gas was too unstable to be used without great danger to personnel. So it was discarded.

After the United States entered the war our chemists began to experiment with all sorts of gases and finally resurrected this arsenic compound. They found that the reason for its spontaneous explosion was that all the water had not been removed and that because of this the gas decomposed. A method of completely dehydrating it was soon found and the resulting gas could be stored indefinitely. One hundred pounds were made for field trial. This consisted in tying a number of goats and dogs throughout a large field some fifteen acres in extent, together with instruments to determine the rate of dispersion and the diffusion of the gas. The small amount used proved fatal to every one of the animals in the field and the gas was found to hug the ground closely and disperse with difficulty.

Arrangements were then made to manufacture this gas on a large scale and just before the Armistice was signed a plant had been completed which could make four tons per day. As the gas mask in use by our troops did not filter this gas, a new type of mask had to be developed. This was done and we now have a mask which will filter "arsene" (as this gas was named) for a period of seventy-two hours and which can easily be made to last much longer.

Fortunately, perhaps, for humanity the signing of the Armistice prevented this gas from being used, for there is no question but that had either side used it their opponents would have been all killed or put out of action.

Since we know the German chemists were every bit as able as our own, is it not reasonable to suppose that they also were working on this same gas and that the small quantity used on the Vosges front was by way of experiment before it was used in larger quantities? They were very thorough and probably wanted to definitely establish ways and means of safely using such a powerful weapon. Its action is very rapid and almost invariably fatal and, as I said above, very small quantities produced death.

The basic formula for the gas is of course beyond me, nor do I know the method of its preparation other than it can be manufactured with reasonable safety in any chemical laboratory.

While I do not see that this comes under prohibited subjects yet, in view of my position, I must ask you not to publish my name with this letter nor give any indication as to its source for it might get me into hot water with some of the "powers that be." As to publishing it, of course, use your own discretion. You may depend upon the accuracy of the information contained.—G. F. E.

And here is another contribution. Having known Larry Barretto for years, both on and off our own staff, I of course guarantee the absolute honesty of his statement that he saw what he says he saw. Whether the effects of the gas may not have been due to defective masks is another matter. Who else at Camp-Fire was near LacNoir in the Vosges Mountains a few days before the Armistice?

Indianapolis Athletic Club,
Indianapolis, Indiana.

With reference to your story "The Phantom Major" appearing in your issue of November 23.

Being an officer of the Chemical Warfare Reserve the note in "Camp-Fire" with reference to the gas attracted my attention, and I wrote to the chief of the C. W. S. and the enclosed reply arrived today.

I trust that this will be of some value in the subject in question.—WILLIAM C. ROYSE.

CWS 000.75/204 1st Ind.
War Dept., Office of Chief, Chemical Warfare Service, November 15, 1926.
To: 1st Lt. William C. Royse, CW-Res., 802 E. Market St., Indianapolis, Ind.

1. Replying to your memorandum of October 28, 1926, with enclosed clipping from the *Adventure* Magazine, the records of the Chemical Warfare Service contain no reference to the gas attack referred to nor is there any information concerning any poison discovered shortly before the close of the war which would go through the gas mask and produce effects such as are described. If the results of this gas attack are as described it seems very probable that the gas masks were defective. There is no objection to your using this information in referring to the Chemical Warfare Service as your authority.

For the Chief of Chemical Warfare Service—
C. E. Brigham, Lt. Col., Chemical Warfare Service, Executive Officer.

AS A SPORT, not as a means of homicide, let this comrade tell us about knife-throwing. And then let's hear from other comrades who, like Mr. Johnson, have had practical experience.

Moosehead Lake, Maine.

In reading the September 8th issue, 1926, I discovered that one T. C. Morris is too severe a critic. He seems to have taken a very extreme view as to the accuracy with which a knife or ax can be thrown. Unfortunately I don't know a thing about throwing axes. Two years ago, however, in fact a year ago last spring, I became quite interested in knife-throwing. At that time I used two Marble's "Ideal" knives with five and six inch blades.

This summer I changed to an 1896 Krag bayonet with six-inch blade. With this knife I can hit a target the size of a man's torso every time at *twenty* feet. I mean by this that the knife sinks into a two-inch plank at each throw, penetrating about two inches.

Just to see what I could do at it for record I made a target one foot square, at one side of which I made a four-inch circle for the heart. This is a fair outline of the average torso. I figure that a knife thrown into this target would be likely to fix a man pretty badly, inasmuch as this area includes a large number of the vital organs. Besides which, a knife that can penetrate one inch on a pine board is likely to go fully six inches into a man.

I threw my knife ten times in succession. The first throw stuck the heart fairly. The next three stuck about two inches to the left (my left) of the heart. The next two stuck almost three inches off the heart on my left. The next two stuck roughly not more than two inches from the heart (that is, two inches from the circumference of heart), and the last two came through strong—both in the heart and not more than an inch from the exact center.

Thus, assuming the heart marked on the boards as the center, my bull's-eye of *six* inches, as mentioned by Mr. Morris, for example, stopped eight shots out of ten; as for the last two shots getting into the center, that is not strange. It is easy to get into a groove when throwing something. I simply look intently at my target and let drive.

To return to Mr. Morris. He speaks of seven out of ten hits at twenty-five feet. I *can* stick a knife at his distance but not as regularly as I can at twenty, although I am quite long, being just over six-three in my socks.

My method of throwing is quite simple. I take the blade between my first finger and thumb with the latter lying along the blade parallel to my arm, and with the finger as a grip underneath. The handle is pointed toward the target. I then bring my arm (bent) back till the knife is just past my head, pivot somewhat like a pitcher, and let drive, putting all my body in it. There must be no flip, for the blade takes but a half turn before it stubes.

The wrist and forearm act as a unit. Wrist play causes the knife to turn too fast for my regular distance. In order to stick it at twenty-five feet the whole arm must act as a unit to cut down the flip of the knife, and under twenty the wrist comes by degrees into play. The blade is taken with the thumb-nail about three inches up from the point at twenty, six up at twenty-five, and under three inches below twenty feet. It is a decided knack which must be acquired before the "twirler" can look for accuracy. It took me a year to stick it with much regularity, and even now I have my bad days.

I am no "heathen," being a Bostonian, and Yankee nine generations back. Any shooter or ball player (I attempt to be both) should like this sport. As for the personal element, it just takes some natural skill and plenty of practise. I got one fellow to stick every time at fifteen feet in a half hour. The "chock" of the knife is fascinating.

As for Mr. Morris' question as to whether a pitcher can stay in six inches, all I can say is, where the deuce will his delivery land at sixty feet if it doesn't pass through an imaginary six-inch circle at twenty-five?

And hence, assuming that the characters under discussion have cut their teeth on such weapons, it would seem probable that they could perform pretty well on occasion. Some put two knives into a porcupine, side by side, at under fifteen feet.

If your authors start in telling about sticking a partridge through the neck on the wing with a knife, then look out! But if they tell of killing a man at not more than forty feet, let them rave. It can be done. I've seen a woman throw a stone and kill a squirrel sitting on a branch fifteen yards away, and she was trying to pick him, too. For that matter I have killed two or three ducks, flying, with a Springfield rifle.

And so it seems to me that Mr. Morris should try to stand midway where there is not too much doubt. I don't swallow this hip-shooting, hand-gun stuff, picking off dimes in the air, etc. But I do stand up

for the knives from my own humble and limited experience. I'm not bragging. I have three or four friends who are as good as I, and one who is better, yet I showed them the game. It is great fun, but one needs a tough heavy knife for my kind of throw.

I hope you will pardon the unnecessary detail, but then, after all, there is very little said about knife-throwing, and to my mind, much too little interest, comparatively, in rifles and rifle-shooting.

With best regards to "Camp-Fire."—MELVIN M. JOHNSON, JR.

SOMETHING from Hugh Pendexter in connection with his complete novelette in this issue.

The novelette, herewith submitted for the pack to gnaw on, is not loaded up with foot-notes, nor history. It does reflect the atmosphere and lawlessness and general terror in the locale and times described. Hawkins Taylor, a deputy sheriff, guarded the Hodge brothers while they were held in the Montrose jail until hanged in the half-breed tract.

The "Whittling Deacons" were an institution in Nauvoo before and after Jose Smith's death.

According to the historical data in the Barnum & Bailey Annual Route Book, 1906, presented to me by Mr. Chas, Andress, when I was a guest of the show, Spencer Quinn Stokes was the first to use a steamboat for a circus on the Miss., 1840-51. In seeming contradiction to this the same authority states the Brown & Lent Circus traveled on the Miss. and Ohio rs. 1835-38, showing from New Orleans to Pittsburg.—PENDEXTER.

BILL ADAMS arises to discuss a Biblical quotation that occurs in "Deep Waters" and to tell something of the actual experience that is behind that story.

In the little red book in which I once read that text off the Horn it read just as it does in my story—

"When thou goest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the deep waters, they shall not overflow thee." I think that this is from the old version.

In the King James version of the Bible you will find it thus—Isaiah, chapter 43, verse 2—

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."

I was yesterday talking with a scholarly cuss of a divine and he said—

"Your version is quite O. K."

So that, even should I, as may be possible, have forgotten the text just as I read it off the Horn one night, it would be I judge quite all right to use the words as I have used them in the story.

The only word that can be brought into question would be the word "rivers," and I guess it doesn't matter, eh?

The incidents as related in my story are as they happened. Except that it was a sudden shift of wind during a heavy gale, when we were driving down on the Diegos and had but a few minutes left to live, that saved us. It could not well have been a closer call. I changed the weather a bit in my story because I like the poetry of calm.

I remember mighty well how cold I felt when I came on deck to find that the Old Man had changed his mind, and was whooping it up for the Horn instead of putting in to Port Stanley. And I remember well indeed the night on which I listlessly, hopelessly, opened that little red book to read that text under those circumstances. While I would ask no one to consider it as anything other than coincidence (knowing as I do the skepticism of us human beings about such things—and knowing also the vast fanaticism of many of us who, ready to believe anything at all, have minds like those of children) I like to keep on my own idea of that grim old wintry night when my ship was tossing off the Ramirez breakers.

It's a poor man who has no little altar of his own. —BILL.

P. S. The little red book was not itself a Bible: but a tiny volume containing a verse, or a part of a verse, from the Bible, for each day of the year.

TO HAVE been with *Adventure* ever since it was born in 1910, nearly nineteen years ago, and at last to say good-by makes something of an occasion, at least so far as I'm concerned. While I go of my own will, it is not possible to sever without a very real regret my relations not only with the magazine itself but with all of you who gather at Camp-Fire. We have met and talked together through the years, been friends, and saying good-by is not easy to me. So little easy that I shall say it briefly and have done.

Yet I need say it only as your editor—your former editor. For I can still come to our Camp-Fire meetings and, if my voice is not raised among the others, it doesn't follow that I have not still ears to listen and still friendship for all those around the blaze.

I've already told you that there is no other to whom I'd more cheerfully leave the fire-tending than Mr. Cox and by this time I think he has already shown you that my faith in him was justified. I have the same faith in his full ability to carry on the magazine as a whole. To you, to him and to *Adventure*, Good Hunting!—A. S. H.

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Old Songs that Men have Sung

Collecting and Discussing Old Songs still Living among the People

State Police

HOW to get into a body of troopers who are fast making a name for themselves.

Request:—"I intend trying for the New York State Troopers but am very much in the dark as to how I am to go about it. Would you kindly enlighten me by answering the following questions which, I believe, will give all the information needed?

1. What are the qualifications?
2. Is it necessary to have seen service in the Army, Navy or Marines, to qualify?
3. Where can one, living in New York City, go to apply for qualification.
4. Give brief outline of training a trooper receives."—S. J. PALMER, N. Y. C.

Reply, by Mr. Bent:—Will answer your questions in the order asked.

1. An applicant for the New York State Police must be a citizen of the U. S.; between the ages of 21 and 40; at least 5 ft. 8 ins. tall, without shoes; weigh at least 140 pounds, stripped; be a practical horseman; show an honorable discharge from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or National Guard. Chauffeur size photo taken within three months prior to date of application must accompany the application.

2. Answers above.

3. Write to Superintendent, Division of State Police, Executive Department, Albany, New York, for application blanks. When the application is received at headquarters you will be notified when and where to report for examinations.

4. Before being assigned to duty, the recruit receives training in horsemanship, courtesy, the Code of Criminal Prodecure, the Penal Code of New York State, and in his bearings towards the public in the performance of his duty. Every year there is a six-weeks' course of the New York State School for Police to which every trooper is sent. It is an advanced course in matters pertaining to police work.

Glad to be of any assistance I can to you. Hope the above will be of benefit to you.

Military Rite

A SOLDIER'S farewell volley. Did it originate in the thrice-uttered "Vale!" of the Romans?

Request:—"I would like any available data concerning the custom of firing a volley over the grave of a deceased service man.

The date and origin of the custom are particularly desired.

If there is anything in Army Regulations covering the subject, request that the number be quoted. I have been unable to find anything covering it."—B. E. Broughton, Fort Monroe, Va.

Reply, by Lieutenant Townsend:—While several writers discuss the subject, none of them gives what seems to me to be a really logical and complete explanation of the custom.

If you have a copy of the "Officers' Manual" compiled by Colonel James A. Moss available you will find that he devotes a paragraph to military funerals under the heading of "The Origin of Certain Practices of the Service" (Par. 488) in which he says: "In the funeral rites of the Romans the casting of the earth three times upon the coffin constituted the burial. It was customary among the Romans to call the dead three times by name, which ended the funeral ceremony, after which the friends and relatives of the deceased pronounced the word 'Vale' (farewell) three times as they departed from the tomb. So that today, when a squad of soldiers fires three volleys over the grave, they are, in accordance with this old Roman custom bidding their dead comrade farewell three times."

This is all very well so far as it goes, but it tells us little about the distinctly military ceremony. As a matter of fact, the use of three as a mystical number and its inclusion in funeral ceremonies was common among peoples far older than the Romans. Lillian Eichler in "The Customs of Mankind" says: "It was customary in Egypt to cast sand three times upon the remains of the deceased—a custom observed with great ceremonial. This survives with us today in our 'ashes to ashes and dust to dust' and a handful of earth cast three times upon the coffin."

An explanation of a military funeral from a different viewpoint is given by Leopold Wagner in "Manners, Customs and Observances." When a military funeral takes place in time of peace, he says "the ceremonial is exactly the same as it would be in camp or on the battlefield. A gun carriage forms an improvised hearse, the drums are muffled out of respect for the dead comrade, and all arms are carried reversed to show that the company deputed to perform the sad office count upon the forbearance of the enemy for the time being; consequently they do not fear an attack. At the conclusion of the ceremony a salute is fired over the grave to intimate to the enemy that they are once more ready to act on the defensive." This is an ingenious explanation but appears to lack something of being a logical one. The author fails to quote authority for his statements and he certainly does not assist us in arriving at any probable date for the beginning of the custom.

Somewhat more to the point is a statement found in Brand's "Popular Antiquities of Great Britain" that the funeral of one W. Wood, buried at Clerkenwell in 1682, was attended by a company of archers who shouted three times over his grave. Also there is the description of a funeral of a French king given by Paul LaCroix in his "Military and Religious Life in the Middle Ages," from which it appears that after the spurs, shield and sword of the dead monarch had been placed in the tomb, a knight cried out three times "The King is dead. Pray for his Soul!" and then "Long live the King his successor!" After which the heralds took up the cry, bugles were sounded and cannon fired.

Certainly the custom as we have it today comes down more or less in its present form from the soldiers of the middle ages. The number of volleys, and perhaps other portions of the ceremony, is a survival from the usages of the ancients. So far as our own service is concerned the custom dates from the beginning as it was observed in the Revolutionary armies. That at the beginning of the last century it had already received the sanction of long usage in the British service we may infer from the first stanza of Charles Wolfe's poem "The Burial of Sir John Moore after Corunna" (1809) in which it is said:

> Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot
> O'er the grave where our hero we buried.

In AR 600-30, Part II, there are references to firing volleys over the graves of military persons. Nothing there aids in determining the date and origin of the custom, however. I have no doubt that among *Adventure* readers are some who would be able to give us very definite information on this interesting subject.

I am sorry that I can not be more helpful in this case.

Snakeskins

HOW TO go about tanning them. Maybe you don't know a rattlesnake's hide is not nearly so tough as its reputation.

Request:—"I would like to tan a large rattlesnake hide, so as to make a belt out of it. Would you please give me the formula for the tanning of reptile skins?"—Marvin White, Ray City, Ga.

Reply, by Mr. Bullock:—Owing to the fact that snakeskins vary a great deal in texture, that is, are not uniform, it is a difficult matter to tan them properly. However, experience is the best teacher and after a few attempts you should be able to do a very good job.

The procedure is as follows: Soak the skin in water until it is perfectly soft. Then prepare a solution of

lime and water in the following proportions:

Use about one pint of slaked lime to a gallon of water and make a sufficient quantity to cover the skin completely. Be sure that the lime is thoroughly slaked or it will burn the skin.

Put your skin in this solution and leave in two or three days, depending on how soon the scales become loose. As soon as the scales become loose remove the skin and with a stiff brush remove the scales. It is not possible to tan snakeskins successfully with the scales on.

Now take a gallon of water, add to it ¼ pound of alum and 2 ounces of salt, stir thoroughly, place the skin in this solution and allow it to remain there for a week or more. When this is done wash the skin through several clear waters and hang up until almost dry. Massage it carefully over a small board or in your hands until all stiff spots disappear.

As soon as you have the skin perfectly soft all over and *dry*, cover it completely with alcohol and immediately apply neatsfoot oil so that as the alcohol dries in it will take the oil with it. Leave it for a few hours and then massage it again in your hands until soft and pliable.

I would suggest that after you have the skin tanned in the above manner you have the skin lined with leather, for snakeskins are not very tough and I imagine that you would not care to have this one break, and as an additional touch after you have this leather lining put on you can give it a coat of shellac.

White River Country

FOR THOSE who like to settle down away from the madding crowd. Land rich in game and fish and remarkably cheap in price.

Request:—"I would appreciate information in regard to land in Arkansas and Missouri. I would like to know the land values of land in the White River country. Would like to get a place in a very thinly populated section away from railroad or towns or main highways. Where the small game hunting is good, and fishing. Would like to get a small place in such a section, if the land is real cheap.

Any information you could give me along this line would be appreciated."—J. R. Floy, Detroit, Michigan.

Reply, by Ozark Ripley:—One of the nicest places I can fancy for you in the White River country would be in the vicinity of Forsyth, Mo. Downstream from there you could get hold of land at from $5 to $30 per acre, which is situated in an exceedingly good game and fish country. At one point in particular, where Beaver Creek enters White River, presents just the character of country you desire, as it is thinly populated and considerable distance from a railway. I feel sure that the postmaster of Forsyth, Taney County, Mo., will be glad to furnish you with information about cheap land in the vicinity.

Most of the fishing is for large and small-mouth bass, and the hunting for deer, turkeys, quail, squirrel, rabbits and ducks.

I trust this supplies the information you desire.

South Sea Islands

AN ENGLISH island in the midst of a Japanese group that belonged to the Germans before the war. And the education of the native children mainly in the hands of Americans.

Honolulu, Hawaii.

Request:—"I am interested in the South Sea Islands, the Marshall Group in particular. As I understand it the Marshall Islands are now under Japan, but there is one little island of the Group called Nauru which is just south of the equator and which went to England. I would like to know how a person could get to Nauru. Are there any steamship lines which touch this island from the outside world? Are there any books written about Nauru and where can I get them? How large is this island and what is its population?

There is a person here whom I am acquainted with that came from Nauru. Being born and raised there until ten years of age, she was sent here to be educated and then to the mainland to a university. Having left Nauru in 1913, at a very young age, she has practically forgotten everything there.

I would appreciate anything you can tell me about this island."—Tom Rodenhurst, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Reply, by Mr. Miller:—As Nauru seems to be the place you want to know most about, I'll concentrate upon that, especially as it happens to have been mandated in part to New Zealand when captured from the Germans with the rest of the Marshall Group. Japan was awarded all the Marshall Islands excepting Nauru, which is rich in phosphates and is being worked mutually by a board representing Britain, Australia and New Zealand. Under this new administration the natives, previously kept under and treated as slaves, have developed into one of the healthiest and most progressive races in the Pacific. Formerly averse to labor, they now do their bit not only in earning wages and working the phosphates, but in improving their island, which appears upon old maps as Pleasant Island.

There is now a good road around the island, wide enough to permit motor automobiles to pass one another. The islanders trade with Japan and the United States. You can get to Nauru from Sydney, N. S. W., as the Burns-Philp Steamship Co. is subsidized to make ten calls per year and to carry mails to and from Australia. The steamers carrying the cargoes of phosphates also voyage to Australia, New Zealand and England. Enquire at Honolulu whether one is due to look in at your port. There is no book written yet on Nauru, which has a population of some 2000 natives. It is an upraised atoll of circular form of about 3½ miles in diameter, its

highest elevation being about 150 feet, lying a few miles south of the Equator and about 160 miles S. W. of Ocean Island, which is also rich in phosphates, the result of centuries of the accumulations from the prolific bird life.

Nauru has a powerful wireless plant erected by the Germans before the war, and the children are being taught educationally by the American Board of Missions and the Sacred Heart Order.

Broadswords

INTEREST in fine blades and expert swordsmanship is by no means dead, even in this day when swords are used chiefly as a symbol of rank.

Request:—"Am intensely interested in single and two-handed broadswords of the straight double-edged type. Please give me the following information on them:

Rapiers—

1. What country produced the best rapiers? Names of best makers?

2. What country produced the second best? Names of best makers?

3. May any of these rapiers be procured at this date? Where?

4. For a strong 200 pound man please give size of rapiers used as

   a. Weight complete?
   b. Length of blade to guard?
   c. Breadth of blade and thickness at maximum point?
   d. Type of guard and length?
   e. Size of handle, and shape in cross section—Length and circum.?
   f. Did blade go straight through hilt to pommel?
   g. Flexibility—how far could they be bent without fracture?
   h. Of what kind of steel are they made, and is it as good as the best weapon steel of today, or better?

5. Of course I understand that rapiers were in vogue over a number of years and that there were changes in them from time to time; but there must have been a small group of years where the rapier reached its greatest perfection. I want the information on the best of rapiers of that period.

6. Is there any one skilled to make rapiers at this time that will be as perfect as those of which I ask information?

7. From whom may the very best épées (stiff 3-cornered dueling rapiers of today) be procured? Name and address?

8. From whom may the best of dueling broadswords, straight and curved of today be procured? Name and address?

All sporting goods companies handle some makes of foils, épées and broadswords, but they are inferior arms and not to be trusted, or desired.

Broadswords at their finest epoch.

* 1. Where were the best broadswords, double-edged, single and two-handed procured, and who were the makers?

2. Are any of these weapons procurable at this date? Where, name and address?

3. For a strong 200 pound man please give size of broadsword used for both two- and single-handed use (same blade).

   a. Weight complete.
   b. Length of blade to guard.
   c. Breadth and thickness of blade at maximum point?
   d. How far from tip was maximum point in inches?
   e. Type of guard, size and length?
   f. Size of handle (hilt) length, circum. and shape in x sect.
   g. Did blade go straight through hilt to pommel?
   h. Of what kind of steel were they made? Can our best steel compare with it, or not?

4. Is there any firm or person skilled to make these double-edged brands, claymores, broadswords, hewers at present time? Names? Address?

Of course I have heard of Toledo blades and Damascus blades, and that Italy, Spain and France were noted for their blades, and that they measured about 34 to 36 inches from guard; but that is all I know of them. Further, that probably England perfected the double-edged hewing type of blade in about the time of Richard Cœur-de-Lion, or perhaps even earlier and that they measured about 34 to 36 inches with a breadth of about 3 inches and a weight of about ten pounds. But all this is a slim picking when I want accurate data.

Perhaps you know of some corking book on the subject that goes into details with great precision. If so, please give me name of book, author and publisher, with address.

I know that this is some order for you to fill, when I see that you have not an edged weapon representative as yet; but please do the best that you can for me.

I hear that Valentino has quite a fine collection of rapiers that are to go to some museum.

I hope in the near future to be so financially situated that I shall be able to make a collection of swords from the four corners of the earth, though I am but little interested in the extreme crescent curved weapons, for they are not as inherently as efficient as the straight blade, or nearly straight blade. I am very interested in the weapons themselves, and also of their use; for I do both rapier and broadsword fencing.

There have been no questions like these that have come up in *Adventure*, and it would be of great interest to publish the answers in an issue, for I am very sure that many *Adventure* readers would care to know about these weapons that carved up Europe, England and even the Americas."

Reply, by Mr. Gardner:—The following data is taken, in part, from a group of rapiers, representative of the period 1550-1700. It is very difficult to give average figures which would cover the rapier in general, as the great variety of types of hilt, the several different cross-section forms of blade, reduce the degree of accuracy with which we would describe a composite rapier.

1. Spain. Can not, in fairness, name a greatest of the many bladesmiths of that country. Alonzo da Sahagun, who worked the third quarter of the 16th century is called "the Raphael of bladesmiths".

2. Germany and North Italy. Heinrich Col or Coel who was born at Solingen, but worked chiefly in Spain, was a craftsman whose blades are much sought after. His period of best production was about 1590-1610.

Andrea dei Ferari, born 1555, died 1583, worked at Belluno, North Italy. His basket-hilted *schiavonas* were the prototypes of the basket-hilted Andrew Feraras of the Scots. It is of interest to note that these Scotch regimental swords are erroneously called claymores. The true claymore is an early two-handed, cross-hilted sword with the quillons (crossbar) downbent.

3. Yes. Francis Bannerman, 501 Broadway, New York City. The Walpole Galleries, 12 West 48th Street, New York City.

4. The choice of a rapier is entirely a matter of personal selection as weight, balance, length, grip dimensions, etc., must be considered.

a. Two pounds, three and one-half ounces.

b. Thirty-eight inch is about the average. The length of the rapier was several times a matter of regulation. Philip and Mary (1553-1558) decreed the length of rapiers should not exceed 40½ inches. Elizabeth (1558-1603) caused the blades worn in London to be shortened to 36 inches.

c. Dependent upon the cross-section form of the blade. The flat, diamond-shaped and triangular section blades are met with.

d. The cup-guard was unquestionably the most perfect form of rapier hilt. These cups vary in depth but are usually about 5 to 6 inches in diameter.

e. The grip proper is short being 3½ to 4 inches in length, of ovate section, 3 inches in circumference and tapering to pommel and quillons.

f. The blade ended above the quillons, a tang which is a prolongation of the blade, passes through guard, grip and pommel.

g. Dependent upon cross section form. I know of an Italian blade, 36 inches in length, which flexes to a hilt to point tangent of 26¾ inches. This is a flat blade.

h. The finer of the Spanish blades were made from selected brown or red hematite or the rich spathose ores, reduced in small blast furnaces, cut up, sorted, reheated, welded, drawn out and the process repeated until a satisfactory product was worked into a laminated bar, then shaped into a blade. Each piece of steel thus produced had its own special degree of strength and elasticity. Every bladesmith had his own mode of hardening and tempering.

A finer blade can be produced by our modern methods. Our modern swords are little more than a symbol of rank and are usually cheaply and poorly constructed, but if the necessity for a good blade, for hand to hand combat, arose, such a blade as the middle ages never knew would be forthcoming.

5. The rapier seems to have evolved into the cup-guard of the 17th century, mounted with a blade of flattened diamond section. The rapier was replaced by the "small" or "court" sword.

6. Not to my knowledge.

7. It is reported that the dueling épées are being made in France at the present time. I regret that I am unable to supply more definite data as to where they may be procured.

8. All manner of high grade foils, broadswords and sabers were produced at Solingen, prior to the World War. Your nearest German consul can, no doubt, supply you with dealer's name and address.

The data requested in the second portion of your letter is more than I can embody in this answer. I would suggest that you try to obtain the following books from your public library:

"The Sword and the Centuries," Alfred Hutton, London, 1901.

"The Forms and History of the Sword," Sir Frederick Pollock, "Oxford Lectures," vol 8, London, 1890.

Rubber

HEVEA BRASILIENSIS—in other words—the Para rubber-tree. How seeds smuggled into the Malay States as botanical specimens served to start a new industry.

Request:—"1. Could you give me information regarding the purchase of rubber land near Santa Cruz? Can I obtain or purchase at once 250 hectares at 40c (U. S.) a hectare? How much would this cost me for a government expert to survey, at the most?

2. Regarding care of rubber-trees and plantations. Tools and implements needed? Does it go through any process before worked up from plantation? How old have trees to be to produce rubber? How often can they be tapped? Does the rubber planter have to bring his produce to market or city himself? How is it prepared for shipment? How close can rubber-trees be planted?

What is the lowest possible price on raw rubber? Is there much danger to have live stock on rubber land near Santa Cruz from snakes or wild animals? Will fencing in be of any benefit to settler? Do I get water from mountain springs or drill well in this section?

What are prices on live stock such as horses, mules, burros, sheep, chickens, etc., in Santa Cruz section? Do I have to bring implements along from

States myself or can I purchase them in Santa Cruz?

3. Can you tell me of other sources of information on this subject?"—CHARLES MESSNER, JR., Bayonne, New Jersey.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—1. Bolivia has many thousand square miles of wild land that is eminently suitable for rubber cultivation. You will have no trouble in obtaining 250 hectares at 40 cts. per acre and cost of survey, if you go about it right. It would be a good plan to get some local American to help you with the government officials, as friendship goes quite a ways in such matters. The cost of the survey will of course depend on how far the government engineer has to come and what expense he is put to to make the survey. Getting to the land is the principal cost, as the running of a line is not a very big affair. I am unable to give an exact figure.

2. The best rubber is produced from the Para rubber-tree or *Hevea Brasiliensis* which is a native of the Amazon valley. I say this because there are a number of trees, vines, and lianas, also a few shrubs which produce rubber. The rubber produced from all of these is worth less than Para rubber. You can get seeds or young trees of this variety down near the Brazilian border in Bolivia, or possibly over in Brazil if you can avoid the local authorities, for there is a government ban in Brazil against exporting them. The entire lot of trees now producing so abundantly in the Malay States for the British planters are from seeds smuggled out of Brazil as botanical specimens.

There is over a million and a half acres of plantation of hevea in Ceylon and the Federated Malay States now and their production has cut the price of raw rubber on the Amazon. The hevea tree is usually planted at the rate of 100 to 150 per acre. It is customary to begin tapping the trees at 5 years of age and the annual yield may be stated at one-half pound per tree. At ten years the yield is 2 or 3 pounds, while at fifteen years it reaches 4 to 6 pounds per tree per year. The hevea tree reaches a height of 100 feet when mature and a girth of 6 to 12 feet. Of the two hevea trees on the Amazon, the up-river trees of Brazil and the upper basin are the best.

The sap is smoked on a paddle into biscuits about the size of pumpkins and the paddle cut off. The smoking is done over palm-nut fires. The biscuits are rafted to market behind a canoe or hauled in a wagon or packed on mule-back. I do not know what the prevailing price for rubber is down there. Any of the big rubber importers can tell you. Try Goodrich. No danger to live stock from snakes. You will not need a fence. Plenty of water from springs and streams. Write American Board of Trade of Bolivia, La Paz, Bolivia, for current prices of stock and poultry. You can bring implements from here or buy locally.

3. Write Pan American Union, Washington, D. C., for booklet "Bolivia," which will be sent free. Also what they have to distribute concerning rubber culture.

Trip and Tour Records

WHAT is written below is not in answer to any one question but is specialized advice that Mr. Spears knows will be valuable to all non-professional travelers.

People travel and tour and trip for experience. Memory of one's adventures and discoveries is of the utmost importance. If we forget where we have been and what we have done, of what use is it to go hither and yon seeking new sensations also to be forgotten? I have had more or less correspondence with 15,000 or so people. I have answered more than 60,000—perhaps 80,000—questions having to do directly with this matter of making the most of outdoor and wildcraft opportunities. My chief important problem has been to find means to prevent useless waste of marvelous human pleasures by persuading youth, especially, to make sure of definite, dated, complete record of delights so that the joy and the lessons need not be lost through failure to preserve the details.

Three things are needed to give one for all time a complete account of one's day to day experiences. A note book, a camera and patience to use them right. In ordinary home life, week after week goes by with no really vivid, unusual event. I find that in commonplace driving around in an automobile, there is an average of about one striking spectacle or incident a trip—something memorable, worthy of a vest pocket photograph and a line or two in a diary. But on a camping trip in new country ten to thirty pictures and at least 300 to 500 words a day are needed.

In practical service I used a 2¼ by 3¼ No. 1 Ansco camera, with a 6.3 lens, taking Ansco or Kodak six exposure roll film. Somebody stole this camera, which I carried in my car, in my pocket, or in my outfit over 40,000 miles or so. I averaged a picture about every ten miles. I drove hundreds of miles without any—I took a dozen in camp ground. After I had exposed a hundred or two films, I obtained more than ten out of twelve pictures attempted. I snapped what interested me—a human, a tree, a bit of road, a mountain, a cactus plant.

I had always made voluminous written notes, day after day on my journeys, up to 2500 words a day for seven months at a stretch. With 300 words and ten or twenty pictures I had the equivalent of 5,000 or so words a day—and the pictures would serve even without written notes, for one remembers pictures taken. I replaced the stolen camera with one of the same kind, but with a 4.5 lens.

No pair of deer horns, no bearskin, no lumps of fossilized wood—not anything equals pictures and a few words of name, place, date, in trophies of a tour on foot in a skiff, by motorcycle, automobile, motorboat, or in any other way. And an album of pictures interspersed with a few lines of notes written on loose-leaf sheets with a portable typewriter or a fountain pen outlasts all other mementoes.

Old SONGS *that Men have Sung*

Conducted by R. W. GORDON

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them. Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and if each request is accompanied with self-addressed envelope and sufficient reply postage (not attached). Write to Mr. R. W. Gordon direct (*not* to the magazine), care of Adventure, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

MORE of the old "forebitters" and "fo'c'sle songs" have come in. There can't be too many of them to suit me. Send in still more! I'll try to find space in the various issues for them. Don't be discouraged if you don't find the song you send printed in the very next issue. The magazine is made up months in advance, and there are many different types of song that deserve a place in the department. The greater the space allowed me, the more I can print. But I can't print any unless they come in, and come in from *you*.

The first comes from Mr. George Hirdt, the most actively helpful of all our district collectors. Wish there were more like him.

The Princess Royal

(*Text from Mr. George Hirdt, Quebec.*)

On the fourteenth of February
  We sailed from the land
In the bold Princess Royal
  Bound for Newfoundland.
With forty bold seamen
  Of our ship's company,
And the wind from the east,
  To the westward sailed we.

We had not been sailing
  Past days two or three,
When a man from the masthead
  A sail he did see.
Came bearing down on us
  To see what we were,
And onto his mizzen
  Black colors did wear.

"Oh God!" cried our Captain,
  "Oh what shall we do?
For here comes a pirate
  To rob us I know."
"No, no," cried our chief mate,
  "That will never be so!
We will shake out our reefs, boys,
  And from him we will go!"

Then the saucy bold pirate
  Hove up alongside
With a large spreading trumpet,
  "Where came you?" he cried.
Our Captain being aft, boys,
  And he answered him so,
"I've come from fair London
  Bound down to Rio."

"Then haul up your foresail
  And heave your ship to,
For I have some letters
  To send there by you."
"I will haul up my foresail
  And heave my ship to,—
It will be in some harbor
  And not alongside of you!"

So we set our fore t'gan'sl
  And royals also,
Both stays'ls and skys'ls
  And from them we did go,
They fired shots after us,
  But they did not prevail,
And the bold Princess Royal
  Soon showed him her heels.

They chased us to windward,
  To windward all day,
They chased us to windward
  But their ship would not stay.
They chased us to windward,
  But they could not make way;
So they altered their course
  And then bore away.

"Thank God!" cried our Captain
  "The pirate is gone.
Go down to your grog, boys,
  Go down every one!
Go down to your grog, boys
  And drink hearty cheer
For while we have sea room,
  My boys, never fear!"

In the next text, contrary to custom, I have made two emendations. I have revised the third and fourth lines and I have changed the "Lassie Mohe" of the original to "the Lass o' Mohea." This was a prime favorite in the old days.

The Lass o' Mohea

(*Text sent by A. R. Hughes, California.*)

As I went out wandering
  For pleasure one day,
To view all creation
  And wile time away,
I sat down amusing
  Myself on the grass,
And what did I spy but
  A fair Indian lass.

She sat down beside me
  And gave me her hand,
Saying, "You are a stranger
  And in a strange land.
But if you will follow
  You are welcome to come,
And live in the cottage
  That I call my home."

The sun was far sinking
  O'er the dark blue sea,
As I went out wandering
  With the Lass o' Mohea.
Together we wandered,
  Together we roved,
Till we came to a cottage
  In the cocoanut grove.

This kind of expression
  She made unto me,
"If you will consent, sir,
  And stay here with me,
If you will consent, sir,
  And stay here with me,
I'll teach you the language
  Of the Lass o' Mohea."

"No, no, my fair maiden,
  That never can be,
For I've a true lover
  In my own country.
I never can forsake her,
  For I know she loves me,—
Her heart is as true
  As the Lass o' Mohea."

It was early one morning,
  One morning in May,
Unto this fair maiden
  These words I did say,
"I'm going to leave you,
  So farewell, we part!
My ship's sails are spreaded
  And homeward I start."

The last time I saw her
  She stood on the strand;
As my boat passed by her
  She waved me her hand,
Saying, "When you are gathered
  With the friends that you love,
Remember Little Mohea
  In the cocoanut grove."

When I was landed
  On my native shore,
With my frineds and relations
  All round me once more,
I gazed all around me
  But not one did I see,—
Not one to compare
  With the Lass o' Mohea.

The girl I had trusted
  Had proved untrue to me.
I'll take my course backward
  Far over the sea,
I'll take my course backward
  Far over the sea,
And there I will stay
  With the Lass o' Mohea!

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all requests for copies of them, direct to R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

CAMP-FIRE BUTTONS—Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Exact size shown. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere. When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed *un*stamped envelope. If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

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The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *out July 1st*

Beginning

Thicker Than Water

A Serial by W. C. Tuttle

Perhaps it was because *Hashknife* hated to think of his stolen horse, Ghost, in strange hands; perhaps it was because he sympathized with Rance McCoy, cattleman of the old school of the West; or very likely, most of all, it was because the place offered him a first class mystery for his genius to solve, that *Hashknife* decided to stop a while in Welcome town.

Two *Complete Novelettes:*

Charles the Bold

By Georges Surdez

The swaggering, peasant-born captain of Spahis was an efficient officer; even his personal enemies could not question his courage. But in the Sudan some men become subject to disturbing superstition, and it began to be rumored that this man was trafficking in black magic.

The Old Earth Eye

By Lyman Bryson

No sane Chinese official is likely to cross the Yangtse River to find out whether the wild Nosu tribesmen are obeying the inescapable edicts of the Middle Kingdom. Their Chinese neighbors leave them strictly alone, have built up fantastic legends about them. But *Peter Williams*, wanderer in far places, thought it a fair ground for research.

Showing the Wife Around

By Leonard H. Nason

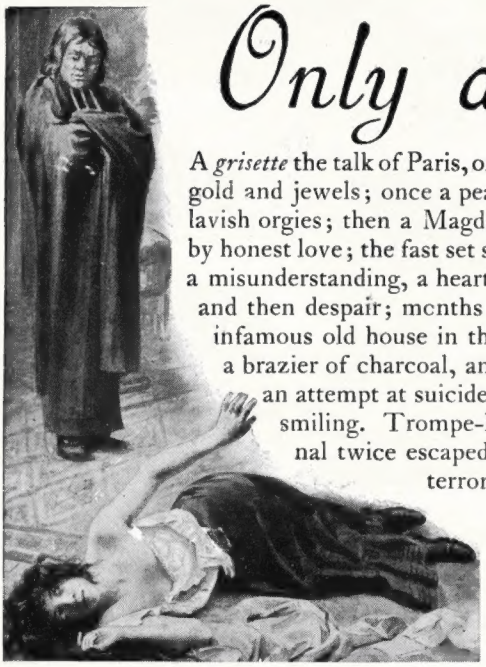
The battlefields of France—some of them just as they were when the last weary doughboy dragged himself out of his muddy ditch—the trench systems, the shell-holes, the residue of shell and ordnance piece—Mr. Nason, who was present on that occasion as artillery sergeant, returns to take another look.

And—*Other Good Stories*

Conclusion of A New Found World, *America discovered*, by Roger Pocock; Sold Foreign, *old salts and beloved ship*, by W. Townend; A Military Interlude, *a deserter from Valley Forge*, by Ernest Haycox; In This Corner, *Clancy and the rabbit's foot*, by Edward L. McKenna; Play-Actin' Fer Gents, *letters of a wandering partner*, by Alan LeMay.

Adventure is out on the 1st and 15th of the month

Only a Butterfly!



A *grisette* the talk of Paris, on whom men had showered gold and jewels; once a peacock-queen reigning over lavish orgies; then a Magdalene purified and uplifted by honest love; the fast set scorned for true happiness; a misunderstanding, a heart broken by a single word, and then despair; months of hiding in a room of an infamous old house in the haunts of the unlawful; a brazier of charcoal, and the girl recovering from an attempt at suicide lies in a stupor, dazed but smiling. Trompe-la-Mort, the master criminal twice escaped from the galleys and the terror of the Paris secret police, disguised as a priest, enters—and the story begins. It is a strange story of one of the many mysterious undercurrents of life in Paris, but it is only one of over a score of infinite variety that are told in the fascinating

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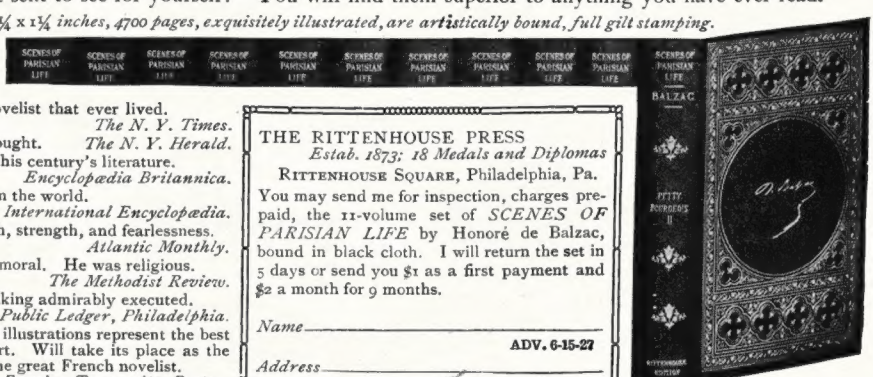

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